

The Collected Teachings of
AJAHN CHAH

VOLUME TWO

FORMAL PRACTICE



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Volume 2 Formal Practice



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In order to make this e-book readable in a variety of electronic formats a simplified form of representing Pali words has been used; some of the diacritical marks have therefore not been included in this edition. To check the spelling of any particular Pali word, please consult the Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary

Preface

The teachings of Venerable Ajahn Chah that have been translated into English and made available in this three-volume edition are direct and clear. It gives me great joy to know such wisdom is being widely distributed.

I had the good fortune of living with or being near Ajahn Chah between 1967 and 1977, which were the peak years of his teaching life. After I received bhikkhu ordination in NE Thailand (Nong Khai Province) in May of 1967, my preceptor had sent me to Wat Nong Pah Pong Monastery for training. It was during that first Rains Retreat (*vassa*), living under Ajahn Chah, that my faith and confidence in this way of practice really arose. During those ten years I had an opportunity to study and come to understand the relationship between Dhamma and Vinaya (discipline), to develop insight into emptiness and form and to recognize the suffering that was caused by my ignorant attachments to conditioned phenomena.

Ajahn Chah's approach to teaching and training is simple and practical. It is a perfect tool for cutting through the delusions of self, cultural and social conceits, and our thinking process. Now his recorded teachings have been translated into English and are available for the asking. I am indeed grateful for all the work that has gone into translating and compiling, and to the sponsors who have made this publication freely available.

The teaching of the Buddha is a great gift and most necessary to deal with the problems of modern societies. May this collection of teachings bring benefit to many.

Luang Por Sumedho, November 2010

A Note On The Text

THIS IS the second of three volumes of The Collected Teachings of Ajahn Chah. These have all been transcribed, translated and edited from talks originally given in the Thai or Laotian language by Ajahn Chah. Some were given to gatherings of lay followers; many, perhaps most, were offered to groups of mainly male monastics living with him in Thailand. These factors inevitably affect not just the content but also the tone and emphasis of the original teachings. Readers are encouraged to bear these circumstances in mind in order to appreciate fully the range and applicability and the full significance of these Dhamma teachings. In a way, Western lay readers will need to make their own inner translation as they go along - finding their own equivalents for all those water buffalo analogies and the context of an ascetic monastic life in the forest - but this kind of engaged reflection, contemplating how these words apply within the ambit of our own lives, is exactly the kind of relationship to the teachings that Ajahn Chah encouraged.

Firstly, amongst these influencing factors there are the inherent difficulties in translating from Thai to English, from a tonal Asian language deeply influenced by Buddhism to a European language with its own cultural resonances. Additionally, several different translators have worked on the teachings gathered in these volumes. The differing nationalities and backgrounds of these translators inevitably mean that there are variations in tone, style and vocabulary between chapters.

Secondly, during the thirty-year period during which these translations were made, Buddhist culture in the West has also greatly changed. Whereas earlier translators perhaps felt that many Buddhist concepts needed to be translated into more familiar Western terms, there is nowadays a greater awareness of the Buddhist worldview; for example, terms like ‘kamma’ and ‘nibbāna’ are now part of accepted English vocabulary. The talks gathered in these volumes therefore show a range of ways of translating Buddhist terms and concepts.

Thirdly, the monastic Buddhist context means that Thai and Pāli words with technical meanings were a regular and accepted part of the vernacular teaching style. The various translators have each made their own decisions about how to render such technical terms. For example, in the Thai language the same word can mean either ‘heart’ or ‘mind’, and translators have had to exercise their own judgement as to how to render it into English. Readers should bear this in mind if they encounter English words used in ways that don’t seem quite natural, or seem inconsistent between the various talks. More often than not non-English words are explained either in the context of the talk or with a footnote. In addition, a glossary of the more common terms

and a list of further resources can be found at the end of the book.

We trust that in our efforts to render oral instruction in a written form we have not obscured the intentions of the teacher. Inevitably some compromises have been made, as different translators have attempted to strike a balance between literal and liberal renderings. For this compilation we have reedited some of the translations for the sake of standardizing terms and style. However we have kept this to a minimum. Further editions of these works might attempt a greater degree of standardization.

Finally, particularly in Volume Three, Renunciant Practice, Ajahn Chah's talks were given in a context where the audience was mainly engaged in a celibate renunciant lifestyle. This circumstance inevitably colours much of the way the Dhamma is presented there. Ajahn Chah also very often talked only to men. This fact explains the constant use of exclusively male pronouns in many of these talks. Although the preservation of such language here may appear to some as an obstruction, it seemed an inappropriate liberty to edit it out. Readers may thus again at times have to make an internal translation of their own, or other leaps of the imagination, in order to illuminate the relevance of those teachings to their own lives.

Ajahn Chah would have been teaching in small halls, dimly lit by kerosine lamps, surrounded by the assembly of monks. The teachings often took the form of exhortations given at the end of the fortnightly recitation of the *Pātimokkha*, the monastic code of discipline. These teachings were thus explicitly directed at monastic residents, so the lay readers of these teachings should remember that they are as much encountering a renunciate style of Buddhist practice as a set of Dhamma teachings.

The three headings, Daily Life Practice, Formal Practice and Renunciant Practice, under which these talks have been organized should not be taken too literally. Within each talk there is a large degree of overlap, accordingly it is not necessary for them to be read in the order in which they have been presented.

The preparation and presentation of this compilation has been a team effort benefiting from the time and skills of many proof-readers, technicians and designers. Particular mention should be made of the offerings of two of the original translators, Paul Breiter and Bruce Evans. We are indebted to all those contributors whose time and effort have brought this project to fruition.

We sincerely hope that with all these perspectives taken to heart, the words contained in these volumes will serve every reader well and be a condition for the realization of Nibbāna. It was with this same intention that Ajahn Chah spoke so much for so many years. May these intentions ripen in the reader's

life and lead to complete peace and freedom.

The compilers

Timeless Teachings

Everyone knows suffering - but they don't really understand suffering. If we really understood suffering, then that would be the end of our suffering.

Westerners are generally in a hurry, so they have greater extremes of happiness and suffering. The fact that they have much *kilesā*, can be a source of wisdom later on.

To live the lay life and practise Dhamma, one must be in the world but remain above it. *Sīla*, beginning with the basic Five Precepts, is the all important parent to all good things. It is for removing all wrong from the mind, removing that which causes distress and agitation. When these basic things are gone, the mind will always be in a state of *samādhi*.

At first, the basic thing is to make *sīla* really firm. Practise formal meditation when there is the opportunity. Sometimes it will be good, sometimes not. Don't worry about it, just continue. If doubts arise, just realize that they, like everything else in the mind, are impermanent.

From this base, *samādhi* will come, but not yet wisdom. One must watch the mind at work - see like and dislike arising from sense contact, and not attach to them.

Don't be anxious for results or quick progress. An infant crawls at first, then learns to walk, then to run and when it is fully grown, can travel half way round the world to Thailand.

Dāna, if given with good intention, can bring happiness to oneself and others. But until *sīla* is complete, giving is not pure, because we may steal from one person and give to another.

Seeking pleasure and having fun is never-ending, one is never satisfied. It's like a water jar with a hole in it. We try to fill it but the water is continually leaking out. The peace of the religious life has a definite end, it puts a stop to the cycle of endless seeking. It's like plugging up the hole in the water jar!

Living in the world, practising meditation, others will look at you like a gong which isn't struck, not producing any sound. They will consider you useless, mad, defeated; but actually it is just the opposite.

As for myself, I never questioned the teachers very much, I have always been a listener. I would listen to what they had to say, whether it was right or wrong did not matter; then I would just practise. The same as you who practise here. You should not have all that many questions. If one has constant mindfulness, then one can examine one's own mental states - we don't need anyone else to examine our moods.

Once when I was staying with an Ajahn I had to sew myself a robe. In those days there weren't any sewing machines, one had to sew by hand, and it was a very trying experience. The cloth was very thick and the needles were dull; one kept stabbing oneself with the needle, one's hands became very sore and blood kept dripping on the cloth. Because the task was so difficult I was anxious to get it done. I became so absorbed in the work that I didn't even notice that I was sitting in the scorching sun dripping with sweat.

The Ajahn came over to me and asked why I was sitting in the sun and not in the cool shade. I told him that I was really anxious to get the work done, 'Where are you rushing off to?' He asked. 'I want to get this job done so that I can do my sitting and walking meditation.' I told him. 'When is our work ever finished?' he asked. 'Oh! ...' This finally brought me around.

'Our worldly work is never finished,' he explained. 'You should use such occasions as this as exercises in mindfulness, and then when you have worked long enough just stop. Put it aside and continue your sitting and walking practice.'

Now I began to understand his teaching. Previously, when I sewed, my mind also sewed and even when I put the sewing away my mind still kept on sewing. When I understood the Ajahn's teaching I could really put the sewing away. When I sewed, my mind sewed, then when I put the sewing down, my mind put the sewing down also. When I stopped sewing, my mind also stopped sewing. Know the good and the bad in travelling or in living in one place. You don't find peace on a hill or in a cave; you can travel to the place of the Buddha's enlightenment, without coming any closer to enlightenment. The important thing is to be aware of yourself, wherever you are, whatever you're doing. *Viriya*, effort, is not a question of what you do outwardly, but just the constant inner awareness and restraint.

It is important not to watch others and find fault with them. If they behave wrongly, there is no need to make yourself suffer. If you point out to them what is correct and they don't practise accordingly, leave it at that. When the Buddha studied with various teachers, he realized that their ways were lacking, but he didn't disparage them. He studied with humility and respect for the teachers, he practised earnestly and realized their systems were not complete, but as he had not yet become enlightened, he did not criticize or attempt to teach them. After he found enlightenment, he recalled those he had studied and practised with and wanted to share his new-found knowledge with them.

We practise to be free of suffering, but to be free of suffering does not mean just to have everything as you would like it, have everyone behave as you

would like them to, speaking only that which pleases you. Don't believe your own thinking on these matters. Generally, the truth is one thing, our thinking is another thing. We should have wisdom in excess of thinking, then there is no problem. When thinking exceeds wisdom, we are in trouble.

Tanhā in practice can be friend or foe. At first it spurs us to come and practise - we want to change things, to end suffering. But if we are always desiring something that hasn't yet arisen, if we want things to be other than they are, then this just causes more suffering.

Sometimes we want to force the mind to be quiet, and this effort just makes it all the more disturbed. Then we stop pushing, and *samādhi* arises; and then in the state of calm and quiet we begin to wonder - what's going on? What's the point of it? ... and we're back to agitation again!

The day before the first *Sanghayana*,¹ one of the Buddha's disciples went to tell Ānanda: 'Tomorrow is the Sangha council, only arahants may attend.' Ānanda was at this time still unenlightened. So he determined: 'Tonight I will do it.' He practised strenuously all night, seeking to become enlightened. But he just made himself tired. So he decided to let go, to rest a bit as he wasn't getting anywhere for all his efforts. Having let go, as soon as he lay down and his head hit the pillow, he became enlightened.

External conditions don't make you suffer, suffering arises from wrong understanding. Feelings of pleasure and pain, like and dislike, arise from sense-contact - you must catch them as they arise, not follow them, not giving rise to craving and attachment - which is in turn causing mental birth and becoming. If you hear people talking, it may stir you up, you think it destroys your calm, your meditation, but you hear a bird chirping and you don't think anything of it, you just let it go as sound, not giving it any meaning or value.

You shouldn't hurry or rush your practice but must think in terms of a long time. Right now we have 'new' meditation; if we have 'old' meditation, then we can practise in every situation, whether chanting, working, or sitting in your hut. We don't have to go seeking for special places to practise. Wanting to practise alone is half right, but also half wrong. It isn't that I don't favour a lot of formal meditation (*samādhi*) but one must know when to come out of it. Seven days, two weeks, one month, two months - and then return to relating to people and situations again. This is where wisdom is gained; too much *samādhi* practice has no advantage other than that one may become mad. Many monks, wanting to be alone, have gone off and just died alone!

Having the view that formal practice is the complete and only way to practise, disregarding one's normal life situation, is called being intoxicated with meditation.

Meditation is giving rise to wisdom in the mind. This we can do anywhere, any time and in any posture.

¹: Sangha Council. The first was convened in the year after the Buddha's final passing away.

Fragments of a Teaching

All of you have believed in Buddhism for many years now through hearing about the Buddhist teachings from many sources - especially from various monks and teachers. In some cases Dhamma is taught in very broad and vague terms to the point where it is difficult to know how to put it into practice in daily life. In other instances Dhamma is taught in high language or special jargon to the point where most people find it difficult to understand, especially if the teaching is drawn too literally from scripture. Lastly Dhamma is taught in a balanced way, neither too vague nor too profound, neither too broad nor too esoteric - just right for the listener to understand and practise to personally benefit from the teachings. Today I would like to share with you teachings of the sort I have often used to instruct my disciples in the past; teachings which I hope may possibly be of personal benefit to those of you listening here today.

One Who Wishes to Reach the Buddha-Dhamma

One who wishes to reach the Buddha-Dhamma must be one who has faith or confidence as a foundation. He must understand the meaning of Buddha-Dhamma as follows:

‘Buddha’ is the ‘one-who-knows’, the one who has purity, radiance and peace in his heart.

‘Dhamma’ means the characteristics of purity, radiance and peace which arise from morality, concentration and wisdom.

Therefore, one who is to reach the Buddha-Dhamma is one who cultivates and develops morality, concentration and wisdom within himself.

Walking the Path of Buddha-Dhamma

Naturally people who wish to reach their home are not those who merely sit and think of travelling. They must actually undertake the process of travelling step by step, and in the right direction as well, in order to finally reach home. If they take the wrong path they may eventually run into difficulties such as swamps or other obstacles which are hard to get around. Or they may run into dangerous situations in this wrong direction, thereby possibly never reaching home.

Those who reach home can relax and sleep comfortably - home is a place of comfort for body and mind. Now they have really reached home. But if the traveller only passed by the front of his home or only walked around it, he would not receive any benefit from having travelled all the way home.

In the same way, walking the path to reach the Buddha-Dhamma is something

each one of us must do individually, for no one can do it for us. And we must travel along the proper path of morality, concentration and wisdom until we find the blessings of purity, radiance and peacefulness of mind that are the fruits of travelling the path.

However, if one only has knowledge of books and scriptures, sermons and suttas, that is, only knowledge of the map or plans for the journey, even in hundreds of lives one will never know purity, radiance and peacefulness of mind. Instead one will just waste time and never get to the real benefits of practice. Teachers are those who only point out the direction of the path. After listening to the teachers, whether or not we walk the path by practising ourselves, and thereby reap the fruits of practice, is strictly up to each one of us.

Another way to look at it is to compare practice to a bottle of medicine a doctor leaves for his patient. On the bottle is written detailed instructions on how to take the medicine, but no matter how many hundred times the patient reads the directions, he is bound to die if that is all he does. He will gain no benefit from the medicine. And before he dies he may complain bitterly that the doctor wasn't any good, that the medicine didn't cure him! He will think that the doctor was a fake or that the medicine was worthless, yet he has only spent his time examining the bottle and reading the instructions. He hasn't followed the advice of the doctor and taken the medicine.

However, if the patient actually follows the doctor's advice and takes the medicine regularly as prescribed, he will recover. And if he is very ill, it will be necessary to take a lot of medicine, whereas if he is only mildly ill, only a little medicine will be needed to finally cure him. The fact that we must use a lot of medicine is a result of the severity of our illness. It's only natural and you can see it for yourself with careful consideration.

Doctors prescribe medicine to eliminate disease from the body. The teachings of the Buddha are prescribed to cure disease of the mind; to bring it back to its natural healthy state. So the Buddha can be considered to be a doctor who prescribes cures for the ills of the mind. He is, in fact, the greatest doctor in the world.

Mental ills are found in each one of us without exception. When you see these mental ills, does it not make sense to look to the Dhamma as support, as medicine to cure your ills? Travelling the path of the Buddha-Dhamma is not done with the body. To reach the benefits, you must travel with the mind. We can divide these travellers into three groups:

First level: this group is comprised of those who understand that they must practise themselves, and know how to do so. They take the Buddha, Dhamma

and Sangha as their refuge and have resolved to practise diligently according to the teachings. These persons have discarded merely following customs and traditions, and instead use reason to examine for themselves the nature of the world. These are the group of 'Buddhist believers'.

Middle level: this group is comprised of those who have practised until they have an unshakable faith in the teachings of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. They also have penetrated to the understanding of the true nature of all compounded formations. These persons gradually reduce clinging and attachment. They do not hold onto things and their minds reach deep understanding of the Dhamma. Depending upon the degree of non-attachment and wisdom they are progressively known as stream-enterers, once-returners and non-returners, or simply, noble ones.

Highest level: this is the group of those whose practice has led them to the body, speech and mind of the Buddha. They are above the world, free of the world, and free of all attachment and clinging. They are known as arahants or free ones, the highest level of the noble ones.

How to Purify One's Morality

Morality is restraint and discipline of body and speech. On the formal level this is divided into classes of precepts for laypeople and for monks and nuns. However, to speak in general terms, there is one basic characteristic - that is intention. When we are mindful or self-recollected, we have right intention. Practising mindfulness (*sati*) and self-recollection (*sampajañña*) will generate good morality.

It is only natural that when we put on dirty clothes and our bodies are dirty, our minds too will feel uncomfortable and depressed. However, if we keep our bodies clean and wear clean, neat clothes, it makes our minds light and cheerful. So too, when morality is not kept, our bodily actions and speech are dirty, and this is a cause for making the mind unhappy, distressed and heavy. We are separated from right practice and this prevents us from penetrating the essence of the Dhamma in our minds. Wholesome bodily actions and speech themselves depend on mind, properly trained, since mind orders body and speech. Therefore, we must continually practise by training our minds.

The Practice of Concentration

The training in concentration (*samādhi*) is practised to make the mind firm and steady. This brings about peacefulness of mind. Usually our untrained minds are moving and restless, hard to control and manage. Mind follows sense distractions wildly just like water flowing this way and that, seeking the lowest level. Agriculturists and engineers, though, know how to control water so that it is of greater use to mankind. Men are clever, they know how to dam

water, make large reservoirs and canals - all of this merely to channel water and make it more usable. In addition, the water stored becomes a source of electrical power and light; and a further benefit from controlling its flow is that the water doesn't run wild, eventually settling into a few low spots, its usefulness wasted.

So, too, the mind which is dammed and controlled, trained constantly, will be of immeasurable benefit. The Buddha himself taught, 'The mind that has been controlled brings true happiness, so train your minds well for the highest of benefits.' Similarly, the animals we see around us - elephants, horses, cattle, buffalo, etc. - must be trained before they can be useful for work. Only after they have been trained is their strength of benefit to us.

In the same way, the mind that has been trained will bring many more times the number of blessings than that of an untrained mind. The Buddha and his noble disciples all started out in the same way as us - with untrained minds; but look how they became the subjects of reverence for us all, and see how much benefit we can gain through their teaching. Indeed, see what benefit has come to the entire world from these men who have gone through the training of the mind to reach the freedom beyond. The mind controlled and trained is better equipped to help us in all professions, in all situations. The disciplined mind will keep our lives balanced, make work easier and develop and nurture reason to govern our actions. In the end our happiness will increase accordingly as we follow the proper mind training.

Mindfulness and Breathing

The training of the mind can be done in many ways, with many different methods. The method which is most useful and can be practised by all types of people is known as 'mindfulness of breathing'. It is the developing of mindfulness on the in-breath and the out-breath. In this monastery we concentrate our attention on the tip of the nose and develop awareness of the in-breath and out-breath with the mantra word '*Bud-dho*'. If the meditator wishes to use another word, or simply be mindful of the air moving in and out, this is also fine. Adjust the practice to suit yourself. The essential factor in the meditation is that the noting or awareness of the breath be kept up in the present moment so that one is mindful of each in-breath and each out-breath just as it occurs. While doing walking meditation we try to be constantly mindful of the sensation of the feet touching the ground.

This practice of meditation must be pursued as continuously as possible in order for it to bear fruit. Don't meditate for a short time one day and then in one or two weeks, or even a month, meditate again. This will not bring results. The Buddha taught us to practise often, to practise diligently, that is, to be as continuous as we can in the practice of mental training. To practise

meditation we should also find a suitably quiet place free from distractions. In gardens or under shady trees in our back yards, or in places where we can be alone are suitable environments. If we are a monk or nun we should find a suitable hut, a quiet forest or cave. The mountains offer exceptionally suitable places for practice.

In any case, wherever we are, we must make an effort to be continuously mindful of breathing in and breathing out. If the attention wanders to other things, try to pull it back to the object of concentration. Try to put away all other thoughts and cares. Don't think about anything - just watch the breath. If we are mindful of thoughts as soon as they arise and keep diligently returning to the meditation subject, the mind will become quieter and quieter.

When the mind is peaceful and concentrated, release it from the breath as the object of concentration. Now begin to examine the body and mind comprised of the five khandhas: material form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness. Examine these five khandhas as they come and go. You will see clearly that they are impermanent, that this impermanence makes them unsatisfactory and undesirable, and that they come and go of their own - there is no 'self' running things. There is to be found only nature moving according to cause and effect. All things in the world fall under the characteristics of instability, unsatisfactoriness and being without a permanent ego or soul. Seeing the whole of existence in this light, attachment and clinging to the khandhas will gradually be reduced. This is because we see the true characteristics of the world. We call this the arising of wisdom.

The Arising of Wisdom

Wisdom (paññā) is to see the truth of the various manifestations of body and mind. When we use our trained and concentrated minds to examine the five khandhas, we will see clearly that both body and mind are impermanent, unsatisfactory and soul-less. In seeing all compounded things with wisdom we do not cling or grasp at them. Whatever we receive, we receive mindfully. We are not excessively happy. When things of ours break up or disappear, we are not unhappy and do not suffer painful feelings - for we see clearly the impermanent nature of all things. When we encounter illness and pain of any sort, we have equanimity because our minds have been well trained. The true refuge is the trained mind.

All of this is known as the wisdom which knows the true characteristics of things as they arise. Wisdom arises from mindfulness and concentration. Concentration arises from a base of morality or virtue. Morality, concentration and wisdom are so inter-related that it is not really possible to separate them. In practice it can be looked at in this way: first, there is the disciplining of the mind to be attentive to breathing. This is the arising of

morality. When mindfulness of breathing is practised continuously until the mind is quiet, this is the arising of concentration. Then examination showing the breath as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self, and the subsequent non-attachment to it, is the arising of wisdom. Thus the practice of mindfulness of breathing can be said to be a course for the development of morality, concentration and wisdom. They all come together.

When morality, concentration and wisdom are all developed, we call this practising the eightfold path which the Buddha taught as our only way out of suffering. The eightfold path is above all others because if properly practised, it leads directly to Nibbāna, to peace. We can say that this practice reaches the Buddha-Dhamma truly and precisely.

Benefits from Practice

When we have practised meditation as explained above, the fruits of practice will arise in the following three stages:

First, for those practitioners who are at the level of ‘Buddhist by faith’, there will arise increasing faith in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. This faith will become the real inner support of each person. Also, they will understand the cause-and-effect nature of all things, that wholesome action brings a wholesome result and that unwholesome action brings an unwholesome result. So, for such persons, there will be a great increase in happiness and mental peace.

Second, those who have reached the noble attainments of stream-winner, once-returner or non-returner, will have unshakable faith in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. They are joyful and are pulled towards Nibbāna.

Third, for those arahants or perfected ones, there will be the happiness free from all suffering. These are the Buddhas, free from the world, complete in the faring of the holy way.

We have all had the good fortune to be born as human beings and to hear the teachings of the Buddha. This is an opportunity that millions of other beings do not have. Therefore, do not be careless or heedless. Hurry and develop merits, do good and follow the path of practice in the beginning, in the middle and in the highest levels. Don’t let time roll by unused and without purpose. Try to reach the truth of the Buddha’s teachings even today. Let me close with a Lao folk-saying: *‘many rounds of merriment and pleasure past, soon it will be evening. Drunk with tears now, rest and see, soon it will be too late to finish the journey.’*

A Gift of Dhamma

I am happy that you have taken this opportunity to come and visit Wat Pah Pong, and to see your son who is a monk here, however I'm sorry I have no gift to offer you. France already has so many material things, but of Dhamma there's very little. Having been there and seen for myself, there isn't really any Dhamma there which could lead to peace and tranquillity. There are only things which continually make one's mind confused and troubled.

France is already materially prosperous, it has so many things to offer which are sensually enticing - sights, sounds, smells, tastes and textures. However, people ignorant of Dhamma only become confused by them. So today I will offer you some Dhamma to take back to France as a gift from Wat Pah Pong and Wat Pah Nanachat.

What is Dhamma? Dhamma is that which can cut through the problems and difficulties of mankind, gradually reducing them to nothing. That's what is called Dhamma and that's what should be studied throughout our daily lives so that when some mental impression arises in us, we'll be able to deal with it and go beyond it.

Problems are common to us all whether living here in Thailand or in other countries. If we don't know how to solve them, we'll always be subject to suffering and distress. That which solves problems is wisdom and to have wisdom we must develop and train the mind.

The subject of practice isn't far away at all, it's right here in our body and mind. Westerners and Thais are the same, they both have a body and mind. A confused body and mind means a confused person and a peaceful body and mind, a peaceful person.

Actually, the mind, like rain water, is pure in its natural state. If we were to drop green colouring into clear rain water, however, it would turn green. If we were to drop yellow colouring, it would turn yellow.

The mind reacts similarly. When a comfortable mental impression 'drops' into the mind, the mind is comfortable. When the mental impression is uncomfortable, the mind is uncomfortable. The mind becomes 'cloudy' just like the coloured water.

When clear water contacts yellow, it turns yellow. When it contacts green, it turns green. It will change colour every time. Actually, that water which is green or yellow is naturally clean and clear. This is also the natural state of the mind, clean and pure and unconfused. It becomes confused only because it pursues mental impressions; it gets lost in its moods!

Let me explain more clearly. Right now we are sitting in a peaceful forest. Here, if there's no wind, a leaf remains still. When a wind blows, it flaps and flutters. The mind is similar to that leaf. When it contacts a mental impression, it, too, 'flaps and flutters' according to the nature of that mental impression. And the less we know of Dhamma, the more the mind will continually pursue mental impressions. Feeling happy, it succumbs to happiness. Feeling suffering, it succumbs to suffering. There is constant confusion!

In the end people become neurotic. Why? Because they don't know! They just follow their moods and don't know how to look after their own minds. When the mind has no one to look after it, it's like a child without a mother or father to take care of it. An orphan has no refuge and, without a refuge, he's very insecure.

Likewise, if the mind is not looked after, if there is no training or maturation of character with right understanding, it's really troublesome.

The method of training the mind which I will give you today is *kammatthāna*. Kamma means 'action' and *thāna* means 'base'. In Buddhism it is the method of making the mind peaceful and tranquil. It's for you to use in training the mind and with the trained mind investigate the body.

Our being is composed of two parts: one is the body, the other, the mind. There are only these two parts. What is called 'the body' is that which can be seen with our physical eyes. 'The mind', on the other hand, has no physical aspect. The mind can only be seen with the 'internal eye' or the 'eye of the mind'. These two things, body and mind, are in a constant state of turmoil.

What is the mind? The mind isn't really any 'thing'. Conventionally speaking, it's that which feels or senses. That which senses, receives and experiences all mental impressions is called 'mind'. Right at this moment there is mind. As I am speaking to you, the mind acknowledges what I am saying. Sounds enter through the ear and you know what is being said. That which experiences this is called 'mind'.

This mind doesn't have any self or substance. It doesn't have any form. It just experiences mental activities, that's all! If we teach this mind to have right view, this mind won't have any problems. It will be at ease.

The mind is mind. Mental objects are mental objects. Mental objects are not the mind, the mind is not mental objects. In order to clearly understand our minds and the mental objects in our minds, we say that the mind is that which receives the mental objects which pop into it. When these two things, mind and its object, come into contact with each other, they give rise to feelings. Some are good, some bad, some cold, some hot ... all kinds! Without wisdom

to deal with these feelings, however, the mind will be troubled.

Meditation is the way of developing the mind so that it may be a base for the arising of wisdom. Here the breath is a physical foundation. We call it *ānāpānasati* or ‘mindfulness of breathing’. Here we make breathing our mental object. We take this object of meditation because it’s the simplest and because it has been the heart of meditation since ancient times.

When a good occasion arises to do sitting meditation, sit cross-legged: right leg on top of the left leg, right hand on top of the left hand. Keep your back straight and erect. Say to yourself, ‘Now I will let go of all my burdens and concerns.’ You don’t want anything that will cause you worry. Let go of all concerns for the time being.

Now fix your attention on the breath. Then breathe in and breathe out. In developing awareness of breathing, don’t intentionally make the breath long or short. Neither make it strong or weak. Just let it flow normally and naturally. Mindfulness and self-awareness, arising from the mind, will know the in-breath and the out-breath.

Be at ease. Don’t think about anything. No need to think of this or that. The only thing you have to do is fix your attention on breathing in and breathing out. You have nothing else to do but that! Keep your mindfulness fixed on the in-breath and out-breath as they occur. Be aware of the beginning, middle and end of each breath. On inhalation, the beginning of the breath is at the nose tip, the middle at the heart, and the end in the abdomen. On exhalation, it’s just the reverse: the beginning of the breath is in the abdomen, the middle at the heart, and the end at the nose tip. Develop the awareness of the breath: 1, at the nose tip; 2, at the heart; 3, in the abdomen. Then in reverse: 1, in the abdomen; 2, at the heart; 3, at the nose tip.

Focusing the attention on these three points will relieve all worries. Just don’t think of anything else! Keep your attention on the breath. Perhaps other thoughts will enter the mind, and it will take up other themes and distract you. Don’t be concerned. Just take up the breathing again as your object of attention. The mind may get caught up in judging and investigating your moods, but continue to practise, being constantly aware of the beginning, middle and the end of each breath.

Eventually, the mind will be aware of the breath at these three points all the time. When you do this practice for some time, the mind and body will get accustomed to the work. Fatigue will disappear. The body will feel lighter and the breath will become more and more refined. Mindfulness and self-awareness will protect the mind and watch over it.

We practise like this until the mind is peaceful and calm, until it is one. ‘One’

means that the mind will be completely absorbed in the breathing; that it doesn't separate from the breath. The mind will be unconfused and at ease. It will know the beginning, middle and end of the breath and remain steadily fixed on it.

Then, when the mind is peaceful, we fix our attention on the in-breath and out-breath at the nose tip only. We don't have to follow it up and down to the abdomen and back. Just concentrate on the tip of the nose where the breath comes in and goes out.

This is called 'calming the mind', making it relaxed and peaceful. When tranquillity arises, the mind stops; it stops with its single object, the breath. This is what's known as making the mind peaceful so that wisdom may arise.

This is the beginning, the foundation of our practice. You should try to practise this every single day, wherever you may be. Whether at home, in the car, lying or sitting down, you should be mindfully aware, watching over the mind constantly.

This is called mental training and should be practised in all the four postures. Not just sitting, but standing, walking and lying as well. The point is that we should know what the state of the mind is at each moment, and to be able to do this, we must be constantly mindful and aware. Is the mind happy or suffering? Is it confused? Is it peaceful? Getting to know the mind in this manner allows it to become tranquil, and when it does become tranquil, wisdom will arise.

With the tranquil mind, investigate the meditation subject - the body - from the top of the head to the soles of the feet, then back to the head. Do this over and over again. Look at and see the hair of the head, hair of the body, the nails, teeth and skin. In this meditation we will see that this whole body is composed of four 'elements': earth, water, fire and wind.

The hard and solid parts of our body make up the earth element; the liquid and flowing parts, the water element. Winds that pass up and down our body make up the wind element, and the heat in our body, the fire element.

Taken together, they compose what we call a 'human being'. However, when the body is broken down into its component parts, only these four elements remain. The Buddha taught that there is no 'being' per se, no human, no Thai, no Westerner, no person, but that ultimately, there are only these four elements - that's all! We assume that there is a person or a 'being' but, in reality, there isn't anything of the sort.

Whether taken separately as earth, water, fire and wind, or taken together labelling what they form a 'human being', they're all impermanent, subject to

suffering and not-self. They are all unstable, uncertain and in a state of constant change - not stable for a single moment!

Our body is unstable, altering and changing constantly. Hair changes, nails change, teeth change, skin changes - everything changes, completely! Our mind, too, is always changing. It isn't a self or substance. It isn't really 'us', not really 'them', although it may think so. Maybe it will think about killing itself. Maybe it will think of happiness or of suffering - all sorts of things! It's unstable. If we don't have wisdom and we believe this mind of ours, it'll lie to us continually. And alternately we suffer and are happy.

This mind is an uncertain thing. This body is uncertain. Together they are impermanent. Together they are a source of suffering. Together they are devoid of self. These, the Buddha pointed out, are neither a being, nor a person, nor a self, nor a soul, nor us, nor them. They are merely elements: earth, water, fire and wind. Elements only!

When the mind sees this, it will rid itself of attachment which holds that 'I am beautiful, 'I am good, 'I am evil, 'I am suffering, 'I have, 'I this or 'I that. You will experience a state of unity, for you'll have seen that all of mankind is basically the same. There is no 'I'. There are only elements.

When you contemplate and see impermanence, suffering and not-self, there will no longer be clinging to a self, a being, I, or he or she. The mind which sees this will give rise to *nibbidā*, disenchantment and dispassion. It will see all things as only impermanent, suffering and not-self.

The mind then stops. The mind is Dhamma. Greed, hatred and delusion will then diminish and recede little by little until finally there is only mind - just the pure mind. This is called 'practising meditation'.

Thus, I ask you to receive this gift of Dhamma which I offer you to study and contemplate in your daily lives. Please accept this Dhamma teaching from Wat Pah Pong and Wat Pah Nanachat as an inheritance handed down to you. All of the monks here, including your son, and all the teachers, make you an offering of this Dhamma to take back to France with you. It will show you the way to peace of mind, it will render your mind calm and unconfused. Your body may be in turmoil, but your mind will not. Those in the world may be confused, but you will not. Even though there is confusion in your country, you will not be confused because the mind will have seen, the mind is Dhamma. This is the right path, the proper way.

May you remember this teaching in the future.

May you be well and happy.

Living with the Cobra

This short talk is for the benefit of a new disciple who will soon be returning to London. May it serve to help you understand the teaching that you have studied here at Wat Pah Pong. Most simply, this is the practice to be free of suffering in the cycle of birth and death.

In order to do this practice, remember to regard all the various activities of mind, all those you like and all those you dislike, in the same way as you would regard a cobra. The cobra is an extremely poisonous snake, poisonous enough to cause death if it should bite us. And so it is with our moods also; the moods that we like are poisonous, the moods that we dislike are also poisonous. They prevent our minds from being free and hinder our understanding of the truth as it was taught by the Buddha.

Thus it is necessary to try to maintain our mindfulness throughout the day and night. Whatever you may be doing, be it standing, sitting, lying down, speaking or whatever, you should do with mindfulness. When you are able to establish this mindfulness, you'll find that there will arise clear comprehension associated with it, and these two conditions will bring about wisdom. Thus mindfulness, clear comprehension and wisdom will work together, and you'll be like one who is *awake* both day and night.

These teachings left to us by the Buddha are not teachings to be just listened to, or simply absorbed on an intellectual level. They are teachings that through practice can be made to arise and be known in our hearts. Wherever we go, whatever we do, we should have these teachings. And what we mean by 'to have these teachings' or 'to have the truth,' is that, whatever we do or say, we do and say with wisdom. When we think and contemplate, we do so with wisdom. We say that one who has mindfulness and clear comprehension combined in this way with wisdom, is one who is close to the Buddha.

When you leave here, you should practise bringing everything back to your own mind. Look at your mind with this mindfulness and clear comprehension and develop this wisdom. With these three conditions there will arise a 'letting go'. You'll know the constant arising and passing away of all phenomena.

You should know that that which is arising and passing away is only the activity of mind. When something arises, it passes away and is followed by further arising and passing away. In the Way of Dhamma we call this arising and passing away 'birth and death'; and this is everything - this is all there is! When suffering has arisen, it passes away, and, when it has passed away, suffering arises again.¹ There's just suffering arising and passing away. When

you see this much, you'll be able to know constantly this arising and passing away. When your knowing is constant, you'll see that this is really all there is. Everything is just birth and death. It's not as if there is anything that carries on. There's just this arising and passing away as it is - that's all.

This kind of seeing will give rise to a tranquil feeling of dispassion towards the world. Such a feeling arises when we see that actually there is nothing worth wanting; there is only arising and passing away, a being born followed by a dying. This is when the mind arrives at 'letting go', letting everything go according to its own nature. Things arise and pass away in our mind, and we know. When happiness arises, we know; when dissatisfaction arises, we know. And this 'knowing happiness' means that we don't identify with it as being ours. Likewise with dissatisfaction and unhappiness, we don't identify with them as being ours. When we no longer identify with and cling to happiness and suffering, we are simply left with the natural way of things.

So we say that mental activity is like the deadly poisonous cobra. If we don't interfere with a cobra, it simply goes its own way. Even though it may be extremely poisonous, we are not affected by it; we don't go near it or take hold of it, and it doesn't bite us. The cobra does what is natural for a cobra to do. That's the way it is. If you are clever you will leave it alone. Let be that which is not good - let it be according to its own nature. Also let be that which is good. Let your liking and your disliking be - the same way that you don't interfere with the cobra.

So, one who is intelligent will have this kind of attitude towards the various moods that arise in the mind. When goodness arises, we let it be good, but we know also. We understand its nature. So, too, we let be the not-good, we let it be according to its nature. We don't take hold of it because we don't want anything. We don't want evil, neither do we want good. We want neither heaviness nor lightness, happiness nor suffering. When, in this way, our wanting is at an end, peace is firmly established.

When we have this kind of peace established in our minds, we can depend on it. This peace, we say, has arisen out of confusion. Confusion has ended. The Buddha called the attainment of final enlightenment an 'extinguishing', in the same way that fire is extinguished. We extinguish fire at the place at which it appears. Wherever it is hot, that's where we can make it cool. And so it is with enlightenment. Nibbāna is found in samsāra. Enlightenment and delusion exist in the same place, just as do hot and cold. It's hot where it was cold and cold where it was hot. When heat arises, the coolness disappears, and when there is coolness, there's no more heat. In this way Nibbāna and samsāra are the same.

We are told to put an end to samsāra, which means to stop the ever-turning

cycle of confusion. This putting an end to confusion is extinguishing the fire. When external fire is extinguished there is coolness. When the internal fires of sensual craving, aversion and delusion are put out, this is coolness also.

This is the nature of enlightenment; it's the extinguishing of fire, the cooling of that which was hot. This is peace. This is the end of samsāra, the cycle of birth and death. When you arrive at enlightenment, this is how it is. It's an ending of the ever-turning and ever-changing, an ending of greed, aversion and delusion in our minds. We talk about it in terms of happiness because this is how worldly people understand the ideal to be, but in reality it has gone beyond. It is beyond both happiness and suffering. It's perfect peace.

So as you go you should take this teaching which I have given you and contemplate it carefully. Your stay here hasn't been easy and I have had little opportunity to give you instruction, but in this time you have been able to study the real meaning of our practice. May this practice lead you to happiness; may it help you grow in truth. May you be freed from the suffering of birth and death.

¹: Suffering in this context refers to the implicit unsatisfactoriness of all compounded existence as distinct from suffering as merely the opposite of happiness.

Reading the Natural Mind

Our way of practice is looking closely at things and making them clear. We're persistent and constant, yet not rushed or hurried. Neither are we too slow. It's a matter of gradually feeling our way and bringing it together. However, all of this bringing together is working towards something, there is a point to our practice.

For most of us, when we first start to practise, it's nothing other than desire. We start to practise because of wanting. At this stage our wanting is wanting in the wrong way. That is, it's deluded. It's wanting mixed with wrong understanding.

If wanting is not mixed with wrong understanding like this, we say that it's wanting with wisdom (*paññā*). It's not deluded - it's wanting with right understanding. In a case like this we say that it's due to a person's *pāramī* or past accumulations. However, this isn't the case with everyone.

Some people don't want to have desire, or they want to not have desires, because they think that our practice is directed at not wanting. However, if there is no desire, then there's no way of practice.

We can see this for ourselves. The Buddha and all his disciples practised to put an end to defilements. We must want to practise and must want to put an end to defilements. We must want to have peace of mind and want to not have confusion. However, if this wanting is mixed with wrong understanding, then it will only amount to more difficulties for us. If we are honest about it, we really know nothing at all. Or, what we do know is of no consequence, since we are unable to use it properly.

Everybody, including the Buddha, started out like this, with the desire to practise - wanting to have peace of mind and wanting to not have confusion and suffering. These two kinds of desire have exactly the same value. If not understood, then both wanting to be free from confusion and not wanting to have suffering are defilements. They're a foolish way of wanting - desire without wisdom.

In our practice we see this desire as either sensual indulgence or self-mortification. It's in this very conflict, just this dilemma, that our teacher, the Buddha, was caught up. He followed many ways of practice which merely ended up in these two extremes. And these days we are exactly the same. We are still afflicted by this duality, and because of it we keep falling from the Way.

However, this is how we must start out. We start out as worldly beings, as

beings with defilements, with wanting devoid of wisdom, desire without right understanding. If we lack proper understanding, then both kinds of desire work against us. Whether it's wanting or not wanting, it's still craving (*tanhā*). If we don't understand these two things then we won't know how to deal with them when they arise. We will feel that to go forward is wrong and to go backwards is wrong, and yet we can't stop. Whatever we do we just find more wanting. This is because of the lack of wisdom and because of craving.

It's right here, with this wanting and not wanting, that we can understand the Dhamma. The Dhamma which we are looking for exists right here, but we don't see it. Rather, we persist in our efforts to stop wanting. We want things to be a certain way and not any other way. Or, we want them not to be a certain way, but to be another way. Really these two things are the same. They are part of the same duality.

Perhaps we may not realize that the Buddha and all of his disciples had this kind of wanting. However the Buddha understood wanting and not wanting. He understood that they are simply the activity of mind, that such things merely appear in a flash and then disappear. These kinds of desires are going on all the time. When there is wisdom, we don't identify with them - we are free from clinging. Whether it's wanting or not wanting, we simply see it as such. In reality it's merely the activity of the natural mind. When we take a close look, we see clearly that this is how it is.

The Wisdom of Everyday Experience

So it's here that our practice of contemplation will lead us to understanding. Let us take an example, the example of a fisherman pulling in his net with a big fish in it. How do you think he feels about pulling it in? If he's afraid that the fish will escape, he'll be rushed and start to struggle with the net, grabbing and tugging at it. Before he knows it, the big fish has escaped - he was trying too hard.

In the olden days they would talk like this. They taught that we should do it gradually, carefully gathering it in without losing it. This is how it is in our practice; we gradually feel our way with it, carefully gathering it in without losing it. Sometimes it happens that we don't feel like doing it. Maybe we don't want to look or maybe we don't want to know, but we keep on with it. We continue feeling for it. This is practice: if we feel like doing it, we do it, and if we don't feel like doing it, we do it just the same. We just keep doing it.

If we are enthusiastic about our practice, the power of our faith will give energy to what we are doing. But at this stage we are still without wisdom. Even though we are very energetic, we will not derive much benefit from our practice. We may continue with it for a long time and then a feeling arises that

we aren't going to find the Way. We may feel that we can not find peace and tranquillity, or that we aren't sufficiently equipped to do the practice. Or maybe we feel that this Way just isn't possible anymore. So we give up!

At this point we must be very, very careful. We must use great patience and endurance. It's just like pulling in the big fish - we gradually feel our way with it. We carefully pull it in. The struggle won't be too difficult, so without stopping we continue pulling it in. Eventually, after some time, the fish becomes tired and stops fighting and we're able to catch it easily. Usually this is how it happens, we practise gradually gathering it together.

It's in this manner that we do our contemplation. If we don't have any particular knowledge or learning in the theoretical aspects of the teachings, we contemplate according to our everyday experience. We use the knowledge which we already have, the knowledge derived from our everyday experience. This kind of knowledge is natural to the mind. Actually, whether we study about it or not, we have the reality of the mind right here already. The mind is the mind whether we have learned about it or not. This is why we say that whether the Buddha is born in the world or not, everything is the way it is. Everything already exists according to its own nature. This natural condition doesn't change, nor does it go anywhere. It just is that way. This is called *saccadhamma*. However, if we don't understand about this *saccadhamma*, we won't be able to recognize it.

So we practise contemplation in this way. If we aren't particularly skilled in scripture, we take the mind itself to study and read. Continually we contemplate,¹ and understanding regarding the nature of the mind will gradually arise. We don't have to force anything.

Constant Effort

Until we are able to stop our mind, until we reach tranquillity, the mind will just continue as before. It's for this reason that the teacher says, 'Just keep on doing it, keep on with the practice!' Maybe we think, 'If I don't yet understand, how can I do it?' Until we are able to practise properly, wisdom doesn't arise. So we say just keep on with it. If we practise without stopping, we'll begin to think about what we are doing. We'll start to consider our practice.

Nothing happens immediately, so in the beginning we can't see any results from our practice. This is like the example I have often given you of the man who tries to make fire by rubbing two sticks of wood together. He says to himself, 'They say there's fire here,' and he begins rubbing energetically. He's very impetuous. He rubs on and on but his impatience doesn't end. He keeps wanting to have that fire, but the fire doesn't come. So he stops to rest for a

while. He starts again but the going is slow, so he rests again. By then the heat has disappeared; he didn't keep at it long enough. He rubs and rubs until he tires and then he stops altogether. Not only is he tired, but he becomes more and more discouraged until he gives up completely. 'There's no fire here!' Actually he was doing the work, but there wasn't enough heat to start a fire. The fire was there all the time but he didn't carry on to the end.

This sort of experience causes the meditator to get discouraged in his practice, and so he restlessly changes from one practice to another. And this sort of experience is also similar to our own practice. It's the same for everybody. Why? Because we are still grounded in defilements. The Buddha had defilements also, but he had a lot of wisdom in this respect. While still worldlings the Buddha and the arahants were just the same as us. If we are still worldlings then we don't think correctly. Thus when wanting arises we don't see it, and when not wanting arises we don't see it. Sometimes we feel stirred up, and sometimes we feel contented. When we have not wanting we have a kind of contentment, but we also have a kind of confusion. When we have wanting, this can be contentment and confusion of another kind. It's all intermixed in this way.

Knowing Oneself and Knowing Others

The Buddha taught us to contemplate our body, for example: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin ... it's all body. Take a look! We are told to investigate right here. If we don't see these things clearly as they are in ourselves, we won't understand regarding other people. We won't see others clearly nor will we see ourselves. However, if we do understand and see clearly the nature of our own bodies, our doubts and wonderings regarding others will disappear. This is because body and mind (*rūpa* and *nāma*) are the same for everybody. It isn't necessary to go and examine all the bodies in the world since we know that they are the same as us - we are the same as them. If we have this kind of understanding then our burden becomes lighter. Without this kind of understanding, all we do is develop a heavier burden. In order to know about others, we would have to go and examine everybody in the entire world. That would be very difficult. We would soon become discouraged.

Our Vinaya is similar to this. When we look at our Vinaya we feel that it's very difficult. We must keep every rule, study every rule, review our practice with every rule. If we just think about it, we think 'Oh, it's impossible!' We read the literal meaning of all the numerous rules and, if we merely follow our thinking about them, we could well decide that it's beyond our ability to keep them all. Anyone who has had this kind of attitude towards the Vinaya has the same feeling about it - there are a lot of rules!

The scriptures tell us that we must examine ourselves regarding each and every rule and keep them all strictly. We must know them all and observe them perfectly. This is the same as saying that to understand others we must go and examine absolutely everybody. This is a very heavy attitude. And it's like this because we take what is said literally. If we follow the textbooks, this is the way we must go. Some teachers teach in this manner - strict adherence to what the textbooks say. It just can't work that way.²

Actually, if we study theory like this, our practice won't develop at all. In fact our faith will disappear, our faith in the Way will be destroyed. This is because we haven't yet understood. When there is wisdom we will understand that all the people in the entire world really amount to just this one person. They are the same as this very being. So we study and contemplate our own body and mind. With seeing and understanding the nature of our own body and mind comes the understanding of the bodies and minds of everyone. And so, in this way, the weight of our practice becomes lighter.

The Buddha said we should teach and instruct ourselves - nobody else can do it for us. When we study and understand the nature of our own existence, we will understand the nature of all existence. Everyone is really the same. We are all the same 'make' and come from the same company - there are only different shades, that's all! Just like *Bort-hai* and *Tum-jai*. They are both pain-killers and do the same thing, but one type is called *Bort-hai* and the other *Tum-jai*. Really they aren't different.

You will find that this way of seeing things gets easier and easier as you gradually bring it all together. We call this 'feeling our way', and this is how we begin to practise. We'll become skilled at doing it. We keep on with it until we arrive at understanding, and when this understanding arises, we will see reality clearly.

Theory and Practice

So we continue this practice until we have a feeling for it. After a time, depending on our own particular tendencies and abilities, a new kind of understanding arises. This we call investigation of Dhamma (*dhammavicaya*), and this is how the seven factors of enlightenment arise in the mind. Investigation of Dhamma is one of them. The others are: mindfulness, energy, rapture, tranquillity, concentration (*samādhi*) and equanimity.

If we have studied about the seven factors of enlightenment, then we'll know what the books say, but we won't have seen the real factors of enlightenment. The real factors of enlightenment arise in the mind. Thus the Buddha came to give us all the various teachings. All the enlightened ones have taught the way out of suffering and their recorded teachings we call the theoretical teachings.

This theory originally came from the practice, but it has become merely book learning or words.

The real factors of enlightenment have disappeared because we don't know them within ourselves, we don't see them within our own minds. If they arise they arise out of practice. If they arise out of practice, then they are factors leading to enlightenment of the Dhamma, and we can use their arising as an indication that our practice is correct. If we are not practising rightly, such things will not appear.

If we practise in the right way, we can see Dhamma. So we say to keep on practising, feeling your way gradually and continually investigating. Don't think that what you are looking for can be found anywhere other than right here.

One of my senior disciples had been learning Pāli at a study temple before he came here. He hadn't been very successful with his studies so he thought that, since monks who practise meditation are able to see and understand everything just by sitting, he would come and try this way. He came here to Wat Pah Pong with the intention of sitting in meditation so that he would be able to translate Pāli scriptures. He had this kind of understanding about practice. So I explained to him about our way. He had misunderstood completely. He had thought it an easy matter just to sit and make everything clear.

If we talk about understanding Dhamma then both study monks and practice monks use the same words. But the actual understanding which comes from studying theory and that which comes from practising Dhamma is not quite the same. It may seem to be the same, but one is more profound. One is deeper than the other. The kind of understanding which comes from practice leads to surrender, to giving up. Until there is complete surrender we persevere - we persist in our contemplation. If desires or anger and dislike arise in our mind, we aren't indifferent to them. We don't just leave them, but rather take them and investigate to see how and from where they arise. If such moods are already in our mind, then we contemplate and see how they work against us. We see them clearly and understand the difficulties we cause ourselves by believing and following them. This kind of understanding is not found anywhere other than in our own pure mind.

It's because of this that those who study theory and those who practice meditation misunderstand each other. Usually those who emphasize study say things like this, 'Monks who only practice meditation just follow their own opinions. They have no basis in the Teaching.' Actually, in one sense, these two ways of study and practice are exactly the same thing. It can help us to understand if we think of it like the front and back of our hand. If we put our

hand out, it seems as if the back of the hand has disappeared. Actually the back of our hand hasn't disappeared, it's just hidden underneath. When we say that we can't see it, it doesn't mean that it has disappeared completely, it just means that it's hidden underneath. When we turn our hand over, the same thing happens to the palm of the hand. It doesn't go anywhere, it's merely hidden underneath.

We should keep this in mind when we consider practice. If we think that it has 'disappeared', we'll go off to study, hoping to get results. But it doesn't matter how much you study *about* Dhamma, you'll never understand, because you won't know in accordance with truth. If we do understand the real nature of Dhamma, then it becomes letting go. This is surrender - removing attachment (*upādāna*), not clinging anymore, or, if there still is clinging, it becomes less and less. There is this kind of difference between the two ways of study and practice.

When we talk about study, we can understand it like this: our eye is a subject of study, our ear is a subject of study - everything is a subject of study. We can know that form is like this and like that, but we attach to form and don't know the way out. We can distinguish sounds, but then we attach to them. Forms, sounds, smells, tastes, bodily feelings and mental impressions are all like a snare to entrap all beings.

To investigate these things is our way of practising Dhamma. When some feeling arises, we turn to our understanding to appreciate it. If we are knowledgeable regarding theory, we will immediately turn to that and see how such and such a thing happens like this and then becomes that ... and so on. If we haven't learned theory in this way, then we have just the natural state of our mind to work with. This is our Dhamma. If we have wisdom then we'll be able to examine this natural mind of ours and use this as our subject of study. It's exactly the same thing. Our natural mind is theory. The Buddha said to take whatever thoughts and feelings arise and investigate them. Use the reality of our natural mind as our theory. We rely on this reality.

Insight Meditation (Vipassanā)

If you have faith it doesn't matter whether you have studied theory or not. If our believing mind leads us to develop practice, if it leads us to constantly develop energy and patience, then study doesn't matter. We have mindfulness as a foundation for our practice. We are mindful in all bodily postures, whether sitting, standing, walking or lying. And if there is mindfulness there will be clear comprehension to accompany it. Mindfulness and clear comprehension will arise together. They may arise so rapidly, however, that we can't tell them apart. But, when there is mindfulness, there will also be clear comprehension.

When our mind is firm and stable, mindfulness will arise quickly and easily and this is also where we have wisdom. Sometimes, though, wisdom is insufficient or doesn't arise at the right time. There may be mindfulness and clear comprehension, but these alone are not enough to control the situation. Generally, if mindfulness and clear comprehension are a foundation of mind, then wisdom will be there to assist. However, we must constantly develop this wisdom through the practice of insight meditation. This means that whatever arises in the mind can be the object of mindfulness and clear comprehension. But we must see according to *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā*. Impermanence (*anicca*) is the basis. *Dukkha* refers to the quality of unsatisfactoriness, and *anattā* says that it is without individual entity. We see that it's simply a sensation that has arisen, that it has no self, no entity and that it disappears of its own accord. Just that! Someone who is deluded, someone who doesn't have wisdom, will miss this occasion, he won't be able to use these things to his advantage.

If wisdom is present then mindfulness and clear comprehension will be right there with it. However, at this initial stage the wisdom may not be perfectly clear. Thus mindfulness and clear comprehension aren't able to catch every object, but wisdom comes to help. It can see what quality of mindfulness is there and what kind of sensation has arisen. Or, in its most general aspect, whatever mindfulness there is or whatever sensation there is, it's all Dhamma.

The Buddha took the practice of insight meditation as his foundation. He saw that this mindfulness and clear comprehension were both uncertain and unstable. Anything that's unstable, and which we want to have stable, causes us to suffer. We want things to be according to our own desires, but we suffer because things just aren't that way. This is the influence of an unclean mind, the influence of a mind which is lacking wisdom.

When we practise we tend to become caught up in wanting it easy, wanting it to be the way we like it. We don't have to go very far to understand such an attitude. Merely look at this body! Is it ever really the way we want it? One minute we like it to be one way and the next minute we like it to be another way. Have we ever really had it the way we liked? The nature of our bodies and minds is exactly the same in this regard. It simply is the way it is.

This point in our practice can be easily missed. Usually, if whatever we feel doesn't agree with us, we throw out; whatever doesn't please us, we throw out. We don't stop to think whether the way we like and dislike things is really the correct way or not. We merely think that the things we find disagreeable must be wrong, and those which we find agreeable must be right.

This is where craving comes from. When we receive stimuli by way of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or mind, a feeling of liking or disliking arises. This shows that the mind is full of attachment. So the Buddha gave us this teaching

of impermanence. He gave us a way to contemplate things. If we cling to something which isn't permanent, we'll experience suffering. There's no reason why we should want to have these things in accordance with our likes and dislikes. It isn't possible for us to make things be that way. We don't have that kind of authority or power. Regardless of how we may like things to be, everything is already the way it is. Wanting like this is not the way out of suffering.

Here we can see how the mind which is deluded understands in one way, and the mind which is not deluded understands in another way. When the mind with wisdom receives some sensation, for example, it sees it as something not to be clung to or identified with. This is what indicates wisdom. If there isn't any wisdom we merely follow our stupidity. This stupidity is not seeing impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self. That which we like we see as good and right. That which we don't like we see as not good. We can't arrive at Dhamma this way - wisdom can not arise. If we can see this, then wisdom arises.

The Buddha firmly established the practice of insight meditation in his mind and used it to investigate all the various mental impressions. Whatever arose in his mind he investigated like this: even though we like it, it's uncertain. It's suffering, because these things which are constantly rising and falling don't follow the influence of our minds. All these things are not a being or a self, they don't belong to us. The Buddha taught us to see them just as they are. We stand on this principle in our practice.

We understand then, that we aren't able to just bring about various moods as we wish. Both good moods and bad moods are going to come up. Some of them are helpful and some of them are not. If we don't understand correctly regarding these things, we won't be able to judge correctly. Rather, we will go running after craving - running off following our desire.

Sometimes we feel happy and sometimes we feel sad, but this is natural. Sometimes we'll feel pleased and at other times disappointed. What we like we hold as good, and what we don't like we hold as bad. In this way we separate ourselves further and further from Dhamma. When this happens, we aren't able to understand or recognize Dhamma, and thus we become confused. Desires increase because our minds have nothing but delusion.

This is how we talk about the mind. It isn't necessary to go far away from ourselves to find understanding. We simply see that these states of mind aren't permanent. We see that they are unsatisfactory and that they aren't a permanent self. If we continue to develop our practice in this way, we call it the practice of *vipassanā* or insight meditation. We say that it is recognizing the contents of our mind and in this way we develop wisdom.

Samatha (Calm) Meditation

Our practice of samatha is like this: we establish the practice of mindfulness on the in-and out-breath, for example, as a foundation or means of controlling the mind. By having the mind follow the flow of the breath it becomes steadfast, calm and still. This practice of calming the mind is called 'samatha meditation'. It's necessary to do a lot of this kind of practice because the mind is full of many disturbances. It's very confused. We can't say how many years or how many lives it's been this way. If we sit and contemplate we'll see that there's a lot that doesn't conduce to peace and calm and a lot that leads to confusion!

For this reason the Buddha taught that we must find a meditation subject which is suitable to our particular tendencies, a way of practice which is right for our character. For example, going over and over the parts of the body: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth and skin, can be very calming. The mind can become very peaceful from this practice. If contemplating these five things leads to calm, it's because they are appropriate objects for contemplation according to our tendencies. Whatever we find to be appropriate in this way, we can consider to be our practice and use it to subdue the defilements.

Another example is recollection of death. For those who still have strong greed, aversion and delusion and find them difficult to contain, it's useful to take this subject of personal death as a meditation. We'll come to see that everybody has to die, whether rich or poor. We'll see both good and evil people die. Everybody must die! When we develop this practice we find that an attitude of dispassion arises. The more we practise the easier our sitting produces calm. This is because it's a suitable and appropriate practice for us. If this practice of calm meditation is not agreeable to our particular tendencies, it won't produce this attitude of dispassion. If the object is truly suited to us we'll find it arising regularly, without great difficulty, and we'll find ourselves thinking about it often.

We can see an example of this in our everyday lives. When laypeople bring trays of many different types of food to offer the monks, we taste them all to see which we like. When we have tried each one, we can tell which is most agreeable to us. This is just an example. That which we find agreeable to our taste we'll eat. We won't bother about the other various dishes.

The practice of concentrating our attention on the in-and out-breath is an example of a type of meditation which is suitable for us all. It seems that when we go around doing various different practices, we don't feel so good. But as soon as we sit and observe our breath we have a good feeling, we can see it clearly. There's no need to go looking far away, we can use what is

close to us and this will be better for us. Just watch the breath. It goes out and comes in, out and in - we watch it like this. For a long time we keep watching our breathing in and out and slowly our mind settles. Other activity will arise but we feel like it is distant from us. Just like when we live apart from each other and don't feel so close anymore. We don't have the same strong contact anymore or perhaps no contact at all.

When we have a feeling for this practice of mindfulness of breathing, it becomes easier. If we keep on with this practice, we gain experience and become skilled at knowing the nature of the breath. We'll know what it's like when it's long and what it's like when it's short.

We can talk about the food of the breath. While sitting or walking we breathe, while sleeping we breathe, while awake we breathe. If we don't breathe, then we die. If we think about it we see that we exist only with the help of food. If we don't eat ordinary food for ten minutes, an hour or even a day, it doesn't matter. This is a coarse kind of food. However, if we don't breathe for even a short time we'll die. If we don't breathe for five or ten minutes we will be dead. Try it!

One who is practising mindfulness of breathing should have this kind of understanding. The knowledge that comes from this practice is indeed wonderful. If we don't contemplate then we won't see the breath as food; but actually we are 'eating' air all the time, in, out, in, out ... all the time. Also you'll find that the more you contemplate in this way, the greater the benefits derived from the practice and the more delicate the breath becomes. It may even happen that the breath stops. It appears as if we aren't breathing at all. Actually, the breath is passing through the pores of the skin. This is called the 'delicate breath'. When our mind is perfectly calm, normal breathing can cease in this way. We need not be at all startled or afraid. If there's no breathing what should we do? Just know it! Know that there is no breathing, that's all. This is the right practice here.

Here we are talking about the way of samatha practice, the practice of developing calm. If the object which we are using is right and appropriate for us, it will lead to this kind of experience. This is the beginning, but there is enough in this practice to take us all the way, or at least to where we can see clearly and continue in strong faith. If we keep on with contemplation in this manner, energy will come to us. This is similar to the water in an urn. We put in water and keep it topped up. We keep on filling the urn with water and thereby the insects which live in the water don't die. Making effort and doing our everyday practice is just like this. It all comes back to practice. We feel very good and peaceful.

This peacefulness comes from our one-pointed state of mind. This one-

pointed state of mind, however, can be very troublesome, since we don't want other mental states to disturb us. Actually, other mental states do come and, if we think about it, that in itself can be the one-pointed state of mind. It's like when we see various men and women, but we don't have the same feeling about them as we do about our mother and father. In reality all men are male just like our father and all women are female just like our mother, but we don't have the same feeling about them. We feel that our parents are more important. They hold greater value for us.

This is how it should be with our one-pointed state of mind. We should have the same attitude towards it as we would have towards our own mother and father. All other activity which arises we appreciate in the same way as we feel towards men and women in general. We don't stop seeing them, we simply acknowledge their presence and don't ascribe to them the same value as our parents.

Undoing the Knot

When our practice of samatha arrives at calm, the mind will be clear and bright. The activity of mind will become less and less. The various mental impressions which arise will be fewer. When this happens great peace and happiness will arise, but we may attach to that happiness. We should contemplate that happiness as uncertain. We should also contemplate unhappiness as uncertain and impermanent. We'll understand that all the various feelings are not lasting and therefore not to be clung to. We see things in this way because there's wisdom. We'll understand that things are this way according to their nature.

If we have this kind of understanding, it's like taking hold of one strand of a rope which makes up a knot. If we pull it in the right direction, the knot will loosen and begin to untangle. It'll no longer be so tight or so tense. This is similar to understanding that it doesn't always have to be this way. Before, we felt that things would always be the way they were and, in so doing, we pulled the knot tighter and tighter. This tightness is suffering. Living that way is very tense. So we loosen the knot a little and relax. Why do we loosen it? Because it's tight! If we don't cling to it then we can loosen it. It's not a permanent condition that must always be that way.

We use the teaching of impermanence as our basis. We see that both happiness and unhappiness are not permanent. We see them as not dependable. There is absolutely nothing that's permanent. With this kind of understanding we gradually stop believing in the various moods and feelings which come up in the mind. Wrong understanding will decrease to the same degree that we stop believing in it. This is what is meant by undoing the knot. It continues to become looser. Attachment will be gradually uprooted.

Disenchantment

When we come to see impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self in ourselves, in this body and mind, in this world, then we'll find that a kind of boredom will arise. This isn't the everyday boredom that makes us feel like not wanting to know or see or say anything, or not wanting to have anything to do with anybody at all. That isn't real boredom, it still has attachment, we still don't understand. We still have feelings of envy and resentment and are still clinging to the things which cause us suffering.

The kind of boredom which the Buddha talked about is a condition without anger or lust. It arises out of seeing everything as impermanent. When pleasant feeling arises in our mind, we see that it isn't lasting. This is the kind of boredom we have. We call it *nibbidā* or disenchantment. That means that it's far from sensual craving and passion. We see nothing as being worthy of desire. Whether or not things accord with our likes and dislikes, it doesn't matter to us, we don't identify with them. We don't give them any special value.

Practising like this we don't give things reason to cause us difficulty. We have seen suffering and have seen that identifying with moods can not give rise to any real happiness. It causes clinging to happiness and unhappiness and clinging to liking and disliking, which is in itself the cause of suffering. When we are still clinging like this we don't have an even-minded attitude towards things. Some states of mind we like and others we dislike. If we are still liking and disliking, then both happiness and unhappiness are suffering. It's this kind of attachment which causes suffering. The Buddha taught that whatever causes us suffering is in itself unsatisfactory.

The Four Noble Truths

Hence we understand that the Buddha's teaching is to know suffering and to know what causes it to arise. And further, we should know freedom from suffering and the way of practice which leads to freedom. He taught us to know just these four things. When we understand these four things we'll be able to recognize suffering when it arises and will know that it has a cause. We'll know that it didn't just drift in! When we wish to be free from this suffering, we'll be able to eliminate its cause.

Why do we have this feeling of suffering, this feeling of unsatisfactoriness? We'll see that it's because we are clinging to our various likes and dislikes. We come to know that we are suffering because of our own actions. We suffer because we ascribe value to things. So we say, know suffering, know the cause of suffering, know freedom from suffering and know the Way to this freedom. When we know about suffering we keep untangling the knot. But

we must be sure to untangle it by pulling in the right direction. That is to say, we must know that this is how things are. Attachment will be torn out. This is the practice which puts an end to our suffering.

Know suffering, know the cause of suffering, know freedom from suffering and know the path which leads out of suffering. This is *magga*. It goes like this: right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. When we have the right understanding regarding these things, then we have the path. These things can put an end to suffering. They lead us to morality, concentration and wisdom (*sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*).

We must clearly understand these four things. We must want to understand. We must want to see these things in terms of reality. When we see these four things we call this *saccadhamma*. Whether we look inside or in front or to the right or left, all we see is *saccadhamma*. We simply see that everything is the way it is. For someone who has arrived at Dhamma, someone who really understands Dhamma, wherever he goes, everything will be Dhamma.

¹: Literally: ‘talk with ourselves’

²: On another occasion the Venerable Ajahn completed the analogy by saying that if we know how to guard our own minds, then it is the same as observing all of the numerous rules of the Vinaya.

Just Do It!

Just keep breathing in and out like this. Don't be interested in anything else. It doesn't matter even if someone is standing on their head with their arse in the air. Don't pay it any attention. Just stay with the in-breath and the out-breath. Concentrate your awareness on the breath. Just keep doing it.

Don't take up anything else. There's no need to think about gaining things. Don't take up anything at all. Simply know the in-breath and the out-breath. The in-breath and the out-breath. *Bud* on the in-breath; *dho* on the out-breath. Just stay with the breath in this way until you are aware of the in-breath and aware of the out-breath, aware of the in-breath and aware of the out-breath. Be aware in this way until the mind is peaceful, without irritation, without agitation, merely the breath going out and coming in. Let your mind remain in this state. You don't need a goal yet. This state is the first stage of practice.

If the mind is at ease, if it's at peace, it will be naturally aware. As you keep doing it, the breath diminishes, becomes softer. The body becomes pliable, the mind becomes pliable. It's a natural process. Sitting is comfortable: you're not dull, you don't nod, you're not sleepy. The mind has a natural fluency about whatever it does. It is still. It is at peace. And then when you leave the *samādhi*, you say to yourself, 'Wow, what was that?' You recall the peace that you've just experienced. And you never forget it.

The things which follows along with us are called *sati*, the power of recollection, and *sampajañña*, self-awareness. Whatever we say or do, wherever we go, on almsround or whatever, in eating the meal, washing our almsbowl, then be aware of what it's all about. Be constantly mindful. Follow the mind.

When you're practising walking meditation (*cankama*), have a walking path, say from one tree to another, about fifty feet in length. Walking *cankama* is the same as sitting meditation. Focus your awareness: 'now, I am going to put forth effort. With strong recollection and self-awareness I am going to pacify my mind.' The object of concentration depends on the person. Find what suits you. Some people spread *mettā* to all sentient beings and then leading with their right foot, walk at a normal pace, using the mantra '*Buddho*' in conjunction with the walking, continually being aware of that object. If the mind becomes agitated, stop, calm the mind and then resume walking, constantly self-aware. Aware at the beginning of the path, aware at every stage of the path, the beginning, the middle and the end. Make this knowing continuous.

This is a method, focusing on walking *cankama*. Walking *cankama* means

walking to and fro. It's not easy. Some people see us walking up and down and think we're crazy. They don't realize that walking *cankama* gives rise to great wisdom. Walk to and fro. If you're tired then stand and still your mind. Focus on making the breathing comfortable. When it is reasonably comfortable then switch the attention to walking again.

The postures change by themselves. Standing, walking, sitting, lying down. They change. We can't just sit all the time, stand all the time or lie down all the time. Because we have to spend our time with these different postures, make all four postures beneficial. This is the action. We just keep doing it. It's not easy.

To make it easy to visualise, take this glass and set it down here for two minutes. When the two minutes are up, then move it over there for two minutes. Then move it over here for two minutes. Keep doing that. Do it again and again until you start to suffer, until you doubt, until wisdom arises. 'What am I thinking about, lifting a glass backwards and forwards like a madman.' The mind will think in its habitual way according to the phenomena. It doesn't matter what anyone says. Just keep lifting that glass. Every two minutes, okay - don't daydream, not five minutes. As soon as two minutes are up then move it over here. Focus on that. This is the matter of action.

Looking at the in-breaths and out-breaths is the same. Sit with your right foot resting on your left leg, sit straight, watch the inhalation to its full extent until it completely disappears in the abdomen. When the inhalation is complete then allow the breath out until the lungs are empty. Don't force it. It doesn't matter how long or short or soft the breath is; let it be just right for you. Sit and watch the inhalation and the exhalation, make yourself comfortable with that. Don't allow your mind to get lost. If it gets lost then stop, look to see where it has got to, why it is not following the breath. Go after it and bring it back. Get it to stay with the breath, and, without doubt, one day you will see the reward. Just keep doing it. Do it as if you won't gain anything, as if nothing will happen, as if you don't know who's doing it, but keep doing it anyway. Like rice in the barn. You take it out and sow it in the fields, as if you were throwing it away. You sow it throughout the fields, without being interested in it, and yet it sprouts, rice plants grow up. You transplant it and you've got sweet green rice. That's what it's about.

This is the same. Just sit there. Sometimes you might think, 'why am I watching the breath so intently? Even if I didn't watch it, it would still keep going in and out.'

Well, you'll always find something to think about. That's a view. It is an expression of the mind. Forget it. Keep trying over and over again and make

the mind peaceful.

Once the mind is at peace, the breath will diminish, the body will become relaxed, the mind will become subtle. They will be in a state of balance until it will seem as if there is no breath, but nothing happens to you. When you reach this point, don't panic, don't get up and run out, because you think you've stopped breathing. It just means that your mind is at peace. You don't have to do anything. Just sit there and look at whatever is present.

Sometimes you may wonder, 'Eh, am I breathing?' This is the same mistake. It is the thinking mind. Whatever happens, allow things to take their natural course, no matter what feeling arises. Know it, look at it. But don't be deluded by it. Keep doing it, keep doing it. Do it often. After the meal, air your robe on a line, and get straight out onto the walking meditation path. Keep thinking *Buddho, Buddho*. Think it all the time that you're walking. Concentrate on the word *Buddho* as you walk. Wear the path down, wear it down until it's a trench and it's halfway up your calves, or up to your knees. Just keep walking.

It's not just strolling along in a perfunctory way, thinking about this and that for a length of the path, and then going up into your hut and looking at your sleeping mat, 'How inviting!' Then lying down and snoring away like a pig. If you do that you won't get anything from the practice at all.

Keep doing it until you're fed up and then see how far that laziness goes. Keep looking until you come to the end of laziness. Whatever it is you experience, you have to go all the way through it before you overcome it. It's not as if you can just repeat the word 'peace' to yourself and then as soon as you sit, you expect peace will arise like at the click of a switch, and when it doesn't, you give up, lazy. If that's the case you'll never be peaceful.

It's easy to talk about and hard to do. It's like monks who are thinking of disrobing saying, 'Rice farming doesn't seem so difficult to me. I'd be better off as a rice farmer.' They start farming without knowing about cows or buffaloes, harrows or ploughs, nothing at all. They find out that when you talk about farming it sounds easy, but when you actually try it you get to know exactly what the difficulties are.

Everyone would like to search for peace in that way. Actually, peace does lie right there, but you don't know it yet. You can follow after it, you can talk about it as much as you like, but you won't know what it is.

So, do it. Follow it until you know in pace with the breath, concentrating on the breath using the mantra '*Buddho*'. Just that much. Don't let the mind wander off anywhere else. At this time have this knowing. Do this. Study just this much. Just keep doing it, doing it in this way. If you start thinking that

nothing is happening, just carry on anyway. Just carry on regardless and you will get to know the breath.

Okay, so give it a try! If you sit in this way and the mind gets the hang of it, the mind will reach an optimum, 'just right' state. When the mind is peaceful the self-awareness arises naturally. Then if you want to sit right through the night, you feel nothing, because the mind is enjoying itself. When you get this far, when you're good at it, then you might find you want to give Dhamma talks to your friends until the cows come home. That's how it goes sometimes.

It's like the time when Por Sang¹ was still a postulant. One night he'd been walking *cankama* and then began to sit. His mind became lucid and sharp. He wanted to expound the Dhamma. He couldn't stop. I heard the sound of someone teaching over in that bamboo grove, really belting it out. I thought, 'Is that someone giving a Dhamma talk, or is it the sound of someone complaining about something?' It didn't stop. So I got my flashlight and went over to have a look. I was right. There in the bamboo grove, sitting cross-legged in the light of a lantern, was Por Sang, talking so fast I couldn't keep up.

So I called out to him, 'Por Sang, have you gone crazy?'

He said, 'I don't know what it is, I just want to talk the Dhamma. I sit down and I've got to talk, I walk and I've got to talk. I've just got to expound the Dhamma all the time. I don't know where it's going to end.'

I thought to myself, 'When people practise the Dhamma there's no limit to the things that can happen.'

So keep doing it, don't stop. Don't follow your moods. Go against the grain. Practise when you feel lazy and practise when you feel diligent. Practise when you're sitting and practise when you're walking. When you lie down, focus on your breathing and tell yourself, 'I will not indulge in the pleasure of lying down.' Teach your heart in this way. Get up as soon as you awaken, and carry on putting forth effort.

Eating, tell yourself, 'I eat this food, not with craving, but as medicine, to sustain my body for a day and a night, only in order that I may continue my practice.'

When you lie down, teach your mind. When you eat, teach your mind. Maintain that attitude constantly. If you're going to stand up, then be aware of that. If you're going to lie down, then be aware of that. Whatever you do, be aware. When you lie down, lie on your right side and focus on the breath, using the mantra *Buddho* until you fall asleep. Then when you wake up it's as

if *Buddho* has been there all the time, it's not been interrupted. For peace to arise, there needs to be mindfulness all the time. Don't go looking at other people. Don't be interested in other people's affairs; just be interested in your own affairs.

When you do sitting meditation, sit straight; don't lean your head too far back or too far forwards. Keep a balanced 'just-right' posture like a Buddha image. Then your mind will be bright and clear.

Endure; for as long as you can before changing your posture. If it hurts, let it hurt. Don't be in a hurry to change your position. Don't think to yourself, 'Oh! It's too much. Take a rest.' Patiently endure until the pain has reached a peak, then endure some more.

Endure, endure until you can't keep up the mantra '*Buddho*'. Then take the point where it hurts as your object. 'Oh! Pain. Pain. Real pain.' You can make the pain your meditation object rather than '*Buddho*'. Focus on it continuously. Keep sitting. When the pain has reached its limit, see what happens.

The Buddha said that pain arises by itself and disappears by itself. Let it die; don't give up. Sometimes you may break out in a sweat. Big beads, as large as corn kernels rolling down your chest. But when you've passed through painful feeling once, then you will know all about it. Keep doing it. Don't push yourself too much. Just keep steadily practising.

Be aware while you're eating. You chew and swallow. Where does the food go to? Know what foods agree with you and what foods disagree. Try gauging the amount of food. As you eat, keep looking and when you think that after another five mouthfuls you'll be full, stop and drink some water, and you will have eaten just the right amount. Try it. See whether or not you can do it. But that's not the way we usually do it. When we feel full we take another five mouthfuls. That's what the mind tells us. It doesn't know how to teach itself.

The Buddha told us to keep watching as we eat. Stop five mouthfuls before you're full and drink some water and it will be just right. If you sit or walk afterwards, then you won't feel heavy. Your meditation will improve. But we don't want to do it. We're full up and we take another five mouthfuls. That's the way that craving and defilement is, it goes a different way from the teachings of the Buddha. Someone who lacks a genuine wish to train their minds will be unable to do it. Keep watching your mind.

Be vigilant with sleep. Your success will depend on being aware of the skilful means. Sometimes the time you go to sleep may vary; some nights you have an early night and other times a late night. But try practising like this: whatever time you go to sleep, just sleep at one stretch. As soon as you wake

up, get up immediately. Don't go back to sleep. Whether you sleep a lot or a little, just sleep at one stretch. Make a resolution that as soon as you wake up, even if you haven't had enough sleep, you will get up, wash your face, and then start to walk '*cankama*' or sit meditation. Know how to train yourself in this way. It's not something you can know through listening to someone else. You will know through training yourself, through practice, through doing it. And so I tell you to practise.

This practice of the heart is difficult. When you are doing sitting meditation, then let your mind have only one object. Let it stay with the in-breath and the out-breath and your mind will gradually become calm. If your mind is in turmoil, then it will have many objects. For instance, as soon as you sit, do you think of your home? Some people think of eating Chinese noodles. When you're first ordained you feel hungry, don't you? You want to eat and drink. You think about all kinds of food. Your mind is going crazy. If that's what's going to happen, then let it. But as soon as you overcome it, then it will disappear.

Do it! Have you ever walked *cankama*? What was it like as you walked? Did your mind wander? If it did, then stop and let it come back. If it wanders off a lot, then don't breathe. Hold your breath until your lungs are about to burst. It will come back by itself. No matter how bad it is, if it's racing around all over the place, then hold your breath. As your lungs are about to burst, your mind will return. You must energize the mind. Training the mind isn't like training animals. The mind is truly hard to train. Don't be easily discouraged. If you hold your breath, you will be unable to think of anything and the mind will run back to you of its own accord.

It's like the water in this bottle. When we tip it out slowly then the water drips out; drip ... drip ... drip. But when we tip the bottle up farther the water runs out in a continuous stream, not in separate drops as before. Our mindfulness is similar. If we accelerate our efforts and practise in an even, continuous way, mindfulness will be uninterrupted like a stream of water. No matter whether we are standing, walking, sitting or lying down, that knowledge is uninterrupted, flowing like a stream of water.

Our practice of the heart is like this. After a moment, it's thinking of this and thinking of that. It is agitated and mindfulness is not continuous. But whatever it thinks about, never mind, just keep putting forth effort. It will be like the drops of water that become more frequent until they join up and become a stream. Then our knowledge will be encompassing. Standing, sitting, walking or laying down, whatever you are doing, this knowing will look after you.

Start right now. Give it a try. But don't hurry. If you just sit there watching to

see what will happen, you'll be wasting your time. So be careful. If you try too hard, you won't be successful; but if you don't try at all, then you won't be successful either.

¹: Por Sang: a *bhikkhu* who was living in the monastery.

Questions and Answers

Question: I'm trying very hard in my practice but don't seem to be getting anywhere.

Answer: This is very important. Don't try to get anywhere in the practice. The very desire to be free or to be enlightened will be the desire that prevents your freedom. You can try as hard as you wish, practise ardently night and day, but if it is still with the desire to achieve in mind, you will never find peace. The energy from this desire will be a cause for doubt and restlessness. No matter how long or how hard you practise, wisdom will not arise from desire. So, simply let go. Watch the mind and body mindfully but don't try to achieve anything. Don't cling even to the practice of enlightenment.

Q: What about sleep? How much should I sleep?

A: Don't ask me, I can't tell you. A good average for some is four hours a night. What is important, though, is that you watch and know yourself. If you try to go with too little sleep, the body will feel uncomfortable and mindfulness will be difficult to sustain. Too much sleep leads to a dull or a restless mind. Find the natural balance for yourself. Carefully watch the mind and body and keep track of sleep needs until you find the optimum. If you wake up and then roll over for a snooze, this is defilement. Establish mindfulness as soon as your eyes open.

Q: How about eating? How much should I eat?

A: Eating is the same as sleeping. You must know yourself. Food must be consumed to meet bodily needs. Look at your food as medicine. Are you eating so much that you only feel sleepy after the meal and are you getting fatter every day? Stop! Examine your own body and mind. There is no need to fast. Instead, experiment with the amount of food you take. Find the natural balance for your body. Put all your food together in your bowl following the ascetic practice. Then you can easily judge the amount you take. Watch yourself carefully as you eat. Know yourself. The essence of our practice is just this. There is nothing special you must do. Only watch. Examine yourself. Watch the mind. Then you will know what is the natural balance for your own practice.

Q: Are minds of Asians and Westerners different?

A: Basically there is no difference. Outer customs and language may appear different, but the human mind has natural characteristics which are the same for all people. Greed and hatred are the same in an Eastern or a Western mind. Suffering and the cessation of suffering are the same for all people.

Q: Is it advisable to read a lot or study the scriptures as a part of practice?

A: The Dhamma of the Buddha is not found in books. If you want to really see for yourself what the Buddha was talking about, you don't need to bother with books. Watch your own mind. Examine it to see how feelings come and go, how thoughts come and go. Don't be attached to anything. Just be mindful of whatever there is to see. This is the way to the truths of the Buddha. Be natural. Everything you do in your life here is a chance to practise. It is all Dhamma. When you do your chores, try to be mindful. If you are emptying a spittoon or cleaning a toilet, don't feel you are doing it as a favour for anyone else. There is Dhamma in emptying spittoons. Don't feel you are practising only when sitting still, cross-legged. Some of you have complained that there is not enough time to meditate. Is there enough time to breathe? This is your meditation: mindfulness, naturalness in whatever you do.

Q: Why don't we have daily interviews with the teacher?

A: If you have any questions, you are welcome to come and ask them any time. But we don't need daily interviews here. If I answer your every little question, you will never understand the process of doubt in your own mind. It is essential that you learn to examine yourself, to interview yourself. Listen carefully to the lecture every few days, then use this teaching to compare with your own practice. Is it still the same? Is it different? Why do you have doubts? Who is it that doubts? Only through self-examination can you understand.

Q: Sometimes I worry about the monks' discipline. If I kill insects accidentally, is this bad?

A: Sīla or discipline and morality is essential to our practice, but you must not cling to the rules blindly. In killing animals or in breaking other rules, the important thing is intention. Know your own mind. You should not be excessively concerned about the monks' discipline. If it is used properly, it supports the practice, but some monks are so worried about the petty rules that they can't sleep well. Discipline is not to be carried as a burden. The foundation of our practice here is discipline; good discipline, plus the ascetic rules and practices. Being mindful and careful of even the many supporting rules as well as the basic 227 precepts has great benefit. It makes life very simple. There need be no wondering about how to act, so you can avoid thinking and instead just be simply mindful. The discipline enables us to live together harmoniously; the community runs smoothly. Outwardly everyone looks and acts the same. Discipline and morality are the stepping stones for further concentration and wisdom. By proper use of the monks' discipline and the ascetic precepts, we are forced to live simply, to limit our possessions. So here we have the complete practice of the Buddha: refrain from evil and do

good, live simply keeping to basic needs, purify the mind. That is, be watchful of our mind and body in all postures: sitting, standing, walking or lying down, know yourself.

Q: What can I do about doubts? Some days I'm plagued with doubts about the practice or my own progress, or the teacher.

A: Doubting is natural. Everyone starts out with doubts. You can learn a great deal from them. What is important is that you don't identify with your doubts: that is, don't get caught up in them. This will spin your mind in endless circles. Instead, watch the whole process of doubting, of wondering. See who it is that doubts. See how doubts come and go. Then you will no longer be victimized by your doubts. You will step outside of them and your mind will be quiet. You can see how all things come and go. Just let go of what you are attached to. Let go of your doubts and simply watch. This is how to end doubting.

Q: What about other methods of practice? These days there seem to be so many teachers and so many different systems of meditation that it is confusing.

A: It is like going into town. One can approach from the north, from the south-east, from many roads. Often these systems just differ outwardly. Whether you walk one way or another, fast or slow, if you are mindful, it is all the same. There is one essential point that all good practice must eventually come to - not clinging. In the end, all meditation systems must be let go of. Neither can one cling to the teacher. If a system leads to relinquishment, to not clinging, then it is correct practice.

You may wish to travel, to visit other teachers and try other systems. Some of you have already done so. This is a natural desire. You will find out that a thousand questions asked and knowledge of many systems will not bring you to the truth. Eventually you will get bored. You will see that only by stopping and examining your own mind can you find out what the Buddha talked about. No need to go searching outside yourself. Eventually you must return to face your own true nature. Here is where you can understand the Dhamma.

Q: A lot of times it seems that many monks here are not practising. They look sloppy or unmindful. This disturbs me.

A: It is not proper to watch other people. This will not help your practice. If you are annoyed, watch the annoyance in your own mind. If others' discipline is bad or they are not good monks, this is not for you to judge. You will not discover wisdom watching others. Monks' discipline is a tool to use for your own meditation. It is not a weapon to use to criticize or find fault. No one can do your practice for you, nor can you practise for anyone else. Just be mindful

of your own doings. This is the way to practise.

Q: I have been extremely careful to practise sense restraint. I always keep my eyes lowered and am mindful of every little action I do. When eating, for example, I take a long time and try to see each touch: chewing, tasting, swallowing, etc. I take each step very deliberately and carefully. Am I practising properly?

A: Sense restraint is proper practice. We should be mindful of it throughout the day. But don't overdo it! Walk and eat and act naturally. And then develop natural mindfulness of what is going on within yourself. Don't force your meditation nor force yourself into awkward patterns. This is another form of craving. Be patient. Patience and endurance are necessary. If you act naturally and are mindful, wisdom will come naturally too.

Q: Is it necessary to sit for very long stretches?

A: No, sitting for hours on end is not necessary. Some people think that the longer you can sit, the wiser you must be. I have seen chickens sit on their nests for days on end! Wisdom comes from being mindful in all postures. Your practice should begin as you awaken in the morning. It should continue until you fall asleep. Don't be concerned about how long you can sit. What is important is only that you keep watchful whether you are working or sitting or going to the bathroom.

Each person has his own natural pace. Some of you will die at age fifty, some at age sixty-five, and some at age ninety. So, too, your practices will not all be identical. Don't think or worry about this. Try to be mindful and let things take their natural course. Then your mind will become quieter and quieter in any surroundings. It will become still like a clear forest pool. Then all kinds of wonderful and rare animals will come to drink at the pool. You will see clearly the nature of all things (*sankhārā*) in the world. You will see many wonderful and strange things come and go. But you will be still. Problems will arise and you will see through them immediately. This is the happiness of the Buddha.

Q: I still have very many thoughts. My mind wanders a lot even though I am trying to be mindful.

A: Don't worry about this. Try to keep your mind in the present. Whatever there is that arises in the mind, just watch it. Let go of it. Don't even wish to be rid of thoughts. Then the mind will reach its natural state. No discriminating between good and bad, hot and cold, fast and slow. No me and no you, no self at all. Just what there is. When you walk on almsround, no need to do anything special. Simply walk and see what there is. No need to cling to isolation or seclusion. Wherever you are, know yourself by being

natural and watching. If doubts arise, watch them come and go. It's very simple. Hold on to nothing.

It is as though you are walking down a road. Periodically, you will run into obstacles. When you meet defilements, just see them and just overcome them by letting go of them. Don't think about the obstacles you have passed already. Don't worry about those you have not yet seen. Stick to the present. Don't be concerned about the length of the road or about the destination. Everything is changing. Whatever you pass, do not cling to it. Eventually the mind will reach its natural balance where practice is automatic. All things will come and go of themselves.

Q: Have you ever looked at the Altar Sutra of the 6th Patriarch, Hui Neng?

A: Hui Neng's wisdom is very keen. It is a very profound teaching, not easy for beginners to understand. But if you practice with our discipline and with patience, if you practise not-clinging, you will eventually understand. Once I had a disciple who stayed in a grass-roofed hut. It rained often that rainy season and one day a strong wind blew off half the roof. He did not bother to fix it, he just let it rain in. Several days passed and I asked him about his hut. He said he was practising not-clinging. This is not-clinging without wisdom. It is about the same as the equanimity of a water buffalo. If you live a good life and live simply, if you are patient and unselfish, you will understand the wisdom of Hui Neng.

Q: You have said that samatha and vipassanā, or concentration and insight, are the same. Could you explain this further?

A: It is quite simple. Concentration (samatha) and wisdom (vipassanā) work together. First the mind becomes still by holding on to a meditation object. It is quiet only while you are sitting with your eyes closed. This is samatha and eventually this samādhi-base is the cause for wisdom or vipassanā to arise. Then the mind is still whether you sit with your eyes closed or walk around in a busy city. It's like this. Once you were a child. Now you are an adult. Are the child and the adult the same person? You can say that they are, or looking at it another way, you can say that they are different. In this way samatha and vipassanā could also be looked at as separate. Or it is like food and faeces. Food and faeces could be called the same and they can be called different. Don't just believe what I say, do your practice and see for yourself. Nothing special is needed. If you examine how concentration and wisdom arise, you will know the truth for yourself. These days many people cling to the words. They call their practice vipassanā. Samatha is looked down on. Or they call their practice samatha. It is essential to do samatha before vipassanā, they say. All this is silly. Don't bother to think about it in this way. Simply do the

practice and you'll see for yourself.

Q: Is it necessary to be able to enter absorption in our practice?

A: No, absorption is not necessary. You must establish a modicum of tranquillity and one-pointedness of mind. Then you use this to examine yourself. Nothing special is needed. If absorption comes in your practice, this is OK too. Just don't hold on to it. Some people get hung up with absorption. It can be great fun to play with. You must know proper limits. If you are wise, you will know the uses and limitations of absorption, just as you know the limitations of children versus grown men.

Q: Why do we follow the ascetic rules such as only eating out of our bowls?

A: The ascetic precepts are to help us cut defilement. By following one such as eating out of our bowls, we can be more mindful of our food as medicine. If we have no defilements, then it does not matter how we eat. But here we use the form to make our practice simple. The Buddha did not make the ascetic precepts necessary for all monks, but he allowed them for those who wished to practise strictly. They add to our outward discipline and thereby help increase our mental resolve and strength. These rules are to be kept for yourself. Don't watch how others practise. Watch your own mind and see what is beneficial for you. The rule that we must take whatever meditation hut is assigned to us is a similarly helpful discipline. It keeps monks from being attached to their dwelling place. If they go away and return, they must take a new dwelling. This is our practice - not to cling to anything.

Q: If putting everything together in our bowls is important, why don't you as a teacher do it yourself? Don't you feel it is important for the teacher to set an example?

A: Yes, it is true, a teacher should set an example for his disciples. I don't mind that you criticize me. Ask whatever you wish. But it is important that you do not cling to the teacher. If I were absolutely perfect in outward form, it would be terrible. You would all be too attached to me. Even the Buddha would sometimes tell his disciples to do one thing and then do another himself. Your doubts in your teacher can help you. You should watch your own reactions. Do you think it is possible that I keep some food out of my bowl in dishes to feed the laymen who work around the temple?

Wisdom is for yourself to watch and develop. Take from the teacher what is good. Be aware of your own practice. If I am resting while you must all sit up, does this make you angry? If I call the colour blue red or say that male is female, don't follow me blindly.

One of my teachers ate very fast. He made noises as he ate. Yet he told us to

eat slowly and mindfully. I used to watch him and get very upset. I suffered, but he didn't! I watched the outside. Later, I learned. Some people drive very fast but carefully. Others drive slowly and have many accidents. Don't cling to rules, to outer form. If you watch others at most ten percent of the time and watch yourself ninety percent, this is the proper practice. At first I used to watch my teacher Ajahn Tongrat and had many doubts. People even thought he was mad. He would do strange things or get very fierce with his disciples. Outside he was angry, but inside there was nothing. Nobody there. He was remarkable. He stayed clear and mindful until the moment he died.

Looking outside the self is comparing, discriminating. You will not find happiness that way. Nor will you find peace if you spend your time looking for the perfect man or the perfect teacher. The Buddha taught us to look at the Dhamma, the truth, not to look at other people.

Q: How can we overcome lust in our practice? Sometimes I feel as if I am a slave to my sexual desire.

A: Lust should be balanced by contemplation of loathsomeness. Attachment to bodily form is one extreme and one should keep in mind the opposite. Examine the body as a corpse and see the process of decay or think of the parts of the body such as the lungs, spleen, fat, faeces, and so forth. Remember these and visualize this loathsome aspect of the body when lust arises. This will free you from lust.

Q: How about anger? What should I do when I feel anger arising?

A: You must use loving-kindness. When angry states of mind arise in meditation, balance them by developing feelings of loving-kindness. If someone does something bad or gets angry, don't get angry yourself. If you do, you are being more ignorant than they. Be wise. Keep in mind compassion, for that person is suffering. Fill your mind with loving-kindness as if he were a dear brother. Concentrate on the feeling of loving-kindness as a meditation subject. Spread it to all beings in the world. Only through loving-kindness is hatred overcome.

Sometimes you may see other monks behaving badly. You may get annoyed. This is suffering unnecessarily. It is not yet our Dhamma. You may think like this: 'he is not as strict as I am. They are not serious meditators like us. Those monks are not good monks.' This is a great defilement on your part. Do not make comparisons. Do not discriminate. Let go of your opinions, watch your opinions and watch yourself. This is our Dhamma. You can't possibly make everyone act as you wish or be like you. This wish will only make you suffer. It is a common mistake for meditators to make, but watching other people won't develop wisdom. Simply examine yourself, your feelings. This is how

you will understand.

Q: I feel sleepy a great deal. It makes it hard to meditate.

A: There are many ways to overcome sleepiness. If you are sitting in the dark, move to a lighted place. Open your eyes. Get up and wash your face or take a bath. If you are sleepy, change postures. Walk a lot. Walk backwards. The fear of running into things will keep you awake. If this fails, stand still, clear the mind and imagine it is full daylight. Or sit on the edge of a high cliff or deep well. You won't dare sleep! If nothing works, then just go to sleep. Lay down carefully and try to be aware until the moment you fall asleep. Then as you awaken, get right up. Don't look at the clock or roll over. Start mindfulness from the moment you awaken. If you find yourself sleepy everyday, try to eat less. Examine yourself. As soon as five more spoonfuls will make you full, stop. Then take water until just properly full. Go and sit. Watch your sleepiness and hunger. You must learn to balance your eating. As your practice goes on you will feel naturally more energetic and eat less. But you must adjust yourself.

Q: Why must we do so much prostrating here?

A: Prostrating is very important. It is an outward form that is part of practice. This form should be done correctly. Bring the forehead all the way to the floor. Have the elbows near the knees and the palms of the hands on the floor about three inches apart. Prostrate slowly, be mindful of your body. It is a good remedy for our conceit. We should prostrate often. When you prostrate three times you can keep in mind the qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, that is, the qualities of mind of purity, radiance and peace. So we use the outward form to train ourselves. Body and mind become harmonious. Don't make the mistake of watching how others prostrate. If young novices are sloppy or the aged monks appear unmindful, this is not for you to judge. People can be difficult to train. Some learn fast but others learn slowly. Judging others will only increase your pride. Watch yourself instead. Prostrate often, get rid of your pride.

Those who have really become harmonious with the Dhamma get far beyond the outward form. Everything they do is a way of prostrating. Walking, they prostrate; eating, they prostrate; defecating, they prostrate. This is because they have got beyond selfishness.

Q: What is the biggest problem of your new disciples?

A: Opinions. Views and ideas about all things: about themselves, about practice, about the teachings of the Buddha. Many of those who come here have a high rank in the community. There are wealthy merchants or college graduates, teachers and government officials. Their minds are filled with

opinions about things. They are too clever to listen to others. It is like water in a cup. If a cup is filled with dirty, stale water, it is useless. Only after the old water is thrown out can the cup become useful. You must empty your minds of opinions, then you will see. Our practice goes beyond cleverness and beyond stupidity. If you think, 'I am clever, I am wealthy, I am important, I understand all about Buddhism', you cover up the truth of *anattā* or no-self. All you will see is self, I, mine. But Buddhism is letting go of self. Voidness, emptiness, Nibbāna.

Q: Are defilements such as greed or anger merely illusory or are they real?

A: They are both. The defilements we call lust or greed, or anger or delusion, these are just outward names, appearances; just as we call a bowl large, small, pretty, or whatever. This is not reality. It is the concept we create from craving. If we want a big bowl, we call this one small. Craving causes us to discriminate. The truth, though, is merely what is. Look at it this way. Are you a man? You can say 'yes.' This is the appearance of things. But really you are only a combination of elements or a group of changing aggregates. If the mind is free, it does not discriminate. No big and small, no you and me. There is nothing: *anattā*, we say, or non-self. Really, in the end there is neither *attā* nor *anattā*.

Q: Could you explain a little more about kamma?

A: Kamma is action. Kamma is clinging. Body, speech, and mind all make kamma when we cling. We make habits. These can make us suffer in the future. This is the fruit of our clinging, of our past defilement. All attachment leads to making kamma. Suppose you were a thief before you became a monk. You stole, made others unhappy, made your parents unhappy. Now you are a monk, but when you remember how you made others unhappy, you feel bad and suffer even today. Remember, not only body, but speech and mental action can make conditions for future results. If you did some act of kindness in the past and remember it today, you will be happy. This happy state of mind is the result of past kamma. All things are conditioned by cause - both long term and, when examined, moment to moment. But you need not bother to think about past, or present, or future. Merely watch the body and mind. You must figure kamma out for yourself. Watch your mind. Practise and you will see clearly. Make sure, however, that you leave the kamma of others to them. Don't cling and don't watch others. If I take a poison, I suffer. No need for you to share it with me! Take what is good that your teacher offers. Then you can become peaceful, your mind will become like that of your teacher. If you examine it, you will see. Even if now you don't understand, when you practise, it will become clear. You will know by yourself. This is called practising the Dhamma.

When we were young, our parents used to discipline us and get angry. Really they wanted to help us. You must see it over the long term. Parents and teachers criticize us and we get upset. Later on we see why. After long practice you will know. Those who are too clever leave after a short time. They never learn. You must get rid of your cleverness. If you think yourself better than others, you will only suffer. What a pity. No need to get upset. Just watch.

Q: Sometimes it seems that since becoming a monk I have increased my hardships and suffering.

A: I know that some of you have had a background of material comfort and outward freedom. By comparison, now you live an austere existence. Then in the practice, I often make you sit and wait for long hours. Food and climate are different from your home. But everyone must go through some of this. This is the suffering that leads to the end of suffering. This is how you learn. When you get angry and feel sorry for yourself, it is a great opportunity to understand the mind. The Buddha called defilements our teachers.

All my disciples are like my children. I have only loving-kindness and their welfare in mind. If I appear to make you suffer, it is for your own good. I know some of you are well-educated and very knowledgeable. People with little education and worldly knowledge can practise easily. But it is as if you Westerners have a very large house to clean. When you have cleaned the house, you will have a big living space. You can use the kitchen, the library, the living room. You must be patient. Patience and endurance are essential to our practice. When I was a young monk I did not have it as hard as you. I knew the language and was eating my native food. Even so, some days I despaired. I wanted to disrobe or even commit suicide. This kind of suffering comes from wrong views. When you have seen the truth, though, you are free from views and opinions. Everything becomes peaceful.

Q: I have been developing very peaceful states of mind from meditation. What should I do now?

A: This is good. Make the mind peaceful, concentrated. Use this concentration to examine the mind and body. When the mind is not peaceful, you should also watch. Then you will know true peace. Why? Because you will see impermanence. Even peace must be seen as impermanent. If you are attached to peaceful states of mind you will suffer when you do not have them. Give up everything, even peace.

Q: Did I hear you say that you are afraid of very diligent disciples?

A: Yes, that's right, I am afraid. I am afraid that they are too serious. They try too hard, but without wisdom. They push themselves into unnecessary

suffering. Some of you are determined to become enlightened. You grit your teeth and struggle all the time. This is trying too hard. People are all the same. They don't know the nature of things (*sankhārā*). All formations, mind and body, are impermanent. Simply watch and don't cling.

Others think they know. They criticize, they watch, they judge. That's OK. Leave their opinions to them. This discrimination is dangerous. It is like a road with a very sharp curve. If we think others are worse or better or the same as us, we go off the curve. If we discriminate, we will only suffer.

Q: I have been meditating many years now. My mind is open and peaceful in almost all circumstances. Now I would like to try to backtrack and practise high states of concentration or mind absorption.

A: This is fine. It is a beneficial mental exercise. If you have wisdom, you will not get hung up on concentrated states of mind. It is the same as wanting to sit for long periods. This is fine for training, but really, practice is separate from any posture. It is a matter of directly looking at the mind. This is wisdom. When you have examined and understood the mind, then you have the wisdom to know the limitations of concentration, or of books. If you have practised and understand not-clinging, you can then return to the books. They will be like a sweet dessert. They can help you to teach others. Or you can go back to practise absorption. You have the wisdom to know not to hold on to anything.

Q: Would you review some of the main points of our discussion?

A: You must examine yourself. Know who you are. Know your body and mind by simply watching. In sitting, in sleeping, in eating, know your limits. Use wisdom. The practice is not to try to achieve anything. Just be mindful of what is. Our whole meditation is looking directly at the mind. You will see suffering, its cause and its end. But you must have patience; much patience and endurance. Gradually you will learn. The Buddha taught his disciples to stay with their teachers for at least five years. You must learn the values of giving, of patience and of devotion.

Don't practise too strictly. Don't get caught up with outward form. Watching others is bad practice. Simply be natural and watch that. Our monks' discipline and monastic rules are very important. They create a simple and harmonious environment. Use them well. But remember, the essence of the monks' discipline is watching intention, examining the mind. You must have wisdom. Don't discriminate. Would you get upset at a small tree in the forest for not being tall and straight like some of the others? This is silly. Don't judge other people. There are all varieties. No need to carry the burden of wishing to change them all.

So, be patient. Practise morality. Live simply and be natural. Watch the mind.
This is our practice. It will lead you to unselfishness, to peace.

Steady Practice

Wat Wana Potiyahn¹ here is certainly very peaceful, but this is meaningless if our minds are not calm. All places are peaceful. That some may seem distracting is because of our minds. However, a quiet place can help us to become calm, by giving us the opportunity to train and thus harmonize with its calm.

You should all bear in mind that this practice is difficult. To train in other things is not so difficult, it's easy, but the human mind is hard to train. The Lord Buddha trained his mind. The mind is the important thing. Everything within this body-mind system comes together at the mind. The eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body all receive sensations and send them into the mind, which is the supervisor of all the other sense organs. Therefore, it is important to train the mind. If the mind is well trained, all problems come to an end. If there are still problems, it's because the mind still doubts, it doesn't know in accordance with the truth. That is why there are problems.

So recognize that all of you have come fully prepared for practising Dhamma. Whether standing, walking, sitting or reclining, you are provided with the tools you need to practise, wherever you are. They are there, just like the Dhamma. The Dhamma is something which abounds everywhere. Right here, on land or in water, wherever, the Dhamma is always there. The Dhamma is perfect and complete, but it's our practice that's not yet complete.

The Lord, the fully enlightened Buddha, taught a means by which all of us may practise and come to know this Dhamma. It isn't a big thing, only a small thing, but it's right. For example, look at hair. If we know even one strand of hair, then we know every strand, both our own and also that of others. We know that they are all simply 'hair'. By knowing one strand of hair we know it all.

Or consider people. If we see the true nature of conditions within ourselves, then we know all the other people in the world also, because all people are the same. Dhamma is like this. It's a small thing and yet it's big. That is, to see the truth of one condition is to see the truth of them all. When we know the truth as it is, all problems come to an end.

Nevertheless, the training is difficult. Why is it difficult? It's difficult because of wanting, *tanhā*. If you don't 'want' then you don't practise. But if you practise out of desire you won't see the Dhamma. Think about it, all of you. If you don't want to practise, you can't practise. You must first want to practise in order to actually do the practice. Whether stepping forward or stepping back you meet desire. This is why the cultivators of the past have said that

this practice is something that's extremely difficult to do.

You don't see Dhamma because of desire. Sometimes desire is very strong, you want to see the Dhamma immediately, but the Dhamma is not your mind - your mind is not yet Dhamma. The Dhamma is one thing and the mind is another. It's not that whatever you like is Dhamma and whatever you don't like isn't. That's not the way it goes.

Actually this mind of ours is simply a condition of nature, like a tree in the forest. If you want a plank or a beam, it must come from a tree, but a tree is still only a tree. It's not yet a beam or a plank. Before it can really be of use to us we must take that tree and saw it into beams or planks. It's the same tree but it becomes transformed into something else. Intrinsicly it's just a tree, a condition of nature. But in its raw state it isn't yet of much use to those who need timber. Our mind is like this. It is a condition of nature. As such it perceives thoughts, it discriminates into beautiful and ugly and so on.

This mind of ours must be further trained. We can't just let it be. It's a condition of nature! Train it to realize that it's a condition of nature. Improve on nature so that it's appropriate to our needs, which is Dhamma. Dhamma is something which must be practised and brought within.

If you don't practise you won't know. Frankly speaking, you won't know the Dhamma by just reading it or studying it. Or if you do know it, your knowledge is still defective. For example, this spittoon here. Everybody knows it's a spittoon but they don't fully know the spittoon. Why don't they fully know it? If I called this spittoon a saucepan, what would you say? Suppose that every time I asked for it I said, 'Please bring that saucepan over here,' that would confuse you. Why so? Because you don't fully know the spittoon. If you did, there would be no problem. You would simply pick up that object and hand it to me, because actually there isn't any spittoon. Do you understand? It's a spittoon due to convention. This convention is accepted all over the country, so it's a spittoon. But there isn't any real 'spittoon'. If somebody wants to call it a saucepan it can be a saucepan. It can be whatever you call it. This is called 'concept'. If we fully know the spittoon, even if somebody calls it a saucepan there's no problem. Whatever others may call it, we are unperturbed because we are not blind to its true nature. This is one who knows Dhamma.

Now let's come back to ourselves. Suppose somebody said, 'You're crazy!' or, 'You're stupid,' for example. Even though it may not be true, you wouldn't feel so good. Everything becomes difficult because of our ambitions to have and to achieve. Because of these desires to get and to be, because we don't know according to the truth, we have no contentment. If we know the Dhamma, are enlightened to the Dhamma, greed, aversion and delusion will

disappear. When we understand the way things are, there is nothing for them to rest on.

Why is the practice so difficult and arduous? Because of desires. As soon as we sit down to meditate we want to become peaceful. If we didn't want to find peace we wouldn't sit, we wouldn't practise. As soon as we sit down we want peace to be right there, but wanting the mind to be calm makes for confusion, and we feel restless. This is how it goes. So the Buddha says, 'Don't speak out of desire, don't sit out of desire, don't walk out of desire. Whatever you do, don't do it with desire.' Desire means wanting. If you don't want to do something you won't do it. If our practice reaches this point, we can get quite discouraged. How can we practise? As soon as we sit down there is desire in the mind.

It's because of this that the body and mind are difficult to observe. If they are not the self nor belonging to self, then who do they belong to? Because it's difficult to resolve these things, we must rely on wisdom. The Buddha says we must practise with 'letting go'. But if we let go, then we just don't practise, right? Because we've let go.

Suppose we went to buy some coconuts in the market, and while we were carrying them back someone asked:

'What did you buy those coconuts for?'

'I bought them to eat.'

'Are you going to eat the shells as well?'

'No.'

'I don't believe you. If you're not going to eat the shells then why did you buy them also?'

Well what do you say? How are you going to answer their question? We practise with desire. If we didn't have desire we wouldn't practise. Practising with desire is *tanhā*. Contemplating in this way can give rise to wisdom, you know. For example, those coconuts: Are you going to eat the shells as well? Of course not. Then why do you take them? Because the time hasn't yet come for you to throw them away. They're useful for wrapping up the coconut in. If, after eating the coconut, you throw the shells away, there is no problem.

Our practice is like this. The Buddha said, 'Don't act on desire, don't speak from desire, don't eat with desire.' Standing, walking, sitting or reclining, whatever, don't do it with desire. This means to do it with detachment. It's just like buying the coconuts from the market. We're not going to eat the shells but it's not yet time to throw them away. We keep them first. This is

how the practice is. Concept (*sammuti*) and transcendence (*vimutti*) are co-existent, just like a coconut. The flesh, the husk and the shell are all together. When we buy a coconut we buy the whole lot. If somebody wants to accuse us of eating coconut shells that's their business, we know what we're doing.

Wisdom is something each of us finds for oneself. To see it we must go neither fast nor slow. What should we do? Go to where there is neither fast nor slow. Going fast or going slow is not the way.

But we're all impatient, we're in a hurry. As soon as we begin we want to rush to the end, we don't want to be left behind. We want to succeed. When it comes to fixing their minds for meditation some people go too far. They light the incense, prostrate and make a vow, 'As long as this incense is not yet completely burnt I will not rise from my sitting, even if I collapse or die, no matter what, I'll die sitting.' Having made their vow they start their sitting. As soon as they start to sit, Māra's hordes come rushing at them from all sides. They've only sat for an instant and already they think the incense must be finished. They open their eyes for a peek, 'Oh, there's still ages left!'

They grit their teeth and sit some more, feeling hot, flustered, agitated and confused. Reaching the breaking point they think, 'It *must* be finished by now'. They have another peek. 'Oh, no! It's not even *half-way* yet!'

Two or three times and it's still not finished, so they just give up, pack it in and sit there hating themselves. 'I'm so stupid, I'm so hopeless!' They sit and hate themselves, feeling like a hopeless case. This just gives rise to frustration and hindrances. This is called the hindrance of ill-will. They can't blame others so they blame themselves. And why is this? It's all because of wanting.

Actually it isn't necessary to go through all that. To concentrate means to concentrate with detachment, not to concentrate yourself into knots. But maybe we read the scriptures about the life of the Buddha, how he sat under the Bodhi tree and determined to himself:

'As long as I have still not attained Supreme Enlightenment I will not rise from this place, even if my blood dries up.'

Reading this in the books you may think of trying it yourself. You'll do it like the Buddha. But you haven't considered that your car is only a small one. The Buddha's car was a really big one, he could take it all in one go. With only your tiny, little car, how can you possibly take it all at once? It's a different story altogether.

Why do we think like that? Because we're too extreme. Sometimes we go too low, sometimes we go too high. The point of balance is so hard to find.

Now I'm only speaking from experience. In the past my practice was like this.

Practising in order to get beyond wanting. If we don't want, can we practise? I was stuck here. But to practise with wanting is suffering. I didn't know what to do, I was baffled. Then I realized that the practice which is steady is the important thing. One must practise consistently. They call this the practice that is 'consistent in all postures'. Keep refining the practice, don't let it become a disaster. Practice is one thing, disaster is another.² Most people usually create disaster. When they feel lazy they don't bother to practise, they only practise when they feel energetic. This is how I tended to be.

All of you ask yourselves now, is this right? To practise when you feel like it, not when you don't: is that in accordance with the Dhamma? Is it straight? Is it in line with the teaching? This is what makes practice inconsistent.

Whether you feel like it or not you should practise just the same: this is how the Buddha taught. Most people wait till they're in the mood before practising; when they don't feel like it they don't bother. This is as far as they go. This is called 'disaster', it's not practice. In the true practice, whether you are happy or depressed you practice; whether it's easy or difficult you practice; whether it's hot or cold you practice. It's straight like this. In the real practice, whether standing, walking, sitting or reclining you must have the intention to continue the practice steadily, making your sati consistent in all postures.

At first thought it seems as if you should stand for as long as you walk, walk for as long as you sit, sit for as long as you lie down. I've tried it but I couldn't do it. If a meditator were to make his standing, walking, sitting and lying down all equal, how many days could he keep it up for? Stand for five minutes, sit for five minutes, lie down for five minutes. I couldn't do it for very long. So I sat down and thought about it some more. 'What does it all mean? People in this world can't practise like this!'

Then I realized. 'Oh, that's not right, it can't be right because it's impossible to do. Standing, walking, sitting, reclining ... make them all consistent. To make the postures consistent the way they explain it in the books is impossible.'

But it is possible to do this: the mind, just consider the mind. To have sati, recollection, *sampajañña*, self-awareness, and *paññā*, all-round wisdom, this you can do. This is something that's really worth practising. This means that while standing we have sati, while walking we have sati, while sitting we have sati, and while reclining we have sati - consistently. This is possible. We put awareness into our standing, walking, sitting, lying down - into all postures.

When the mind has been trained like this it will constantly recollect *Buddho*,

Buddho, Buddho ... which is knowing. Knowing what? Knowing what is right and what is wrong at all times. Yes, this is possible. This is getting down to the real practice. That is, whether standing, walking, sitting or lying down there is continuous *sati*.

Then you should understand those conditions which should be given up and those which should be cultivated. You know happiness, you know unhappiness. When you know happiness and unhappiness your mind will settle at the point which is free of happiness and unhappiness. Happiness is the loose path, *kāmasukhallikānuyogo*. Unhappiness is the tight path, *attakilamathānuyogo*.³ If we know these two extremes, we pull it back. We know when the mind is inclining towards happiness or unhappiness and we pull it back, we don't allow it to lean over. We have this sort of awareness, we adhere to the One Path, the single Dhamma. We adhere to the awareness, not allowing the mind to follow its inclinations.

But in your practice it doesn't tend to be like that, does it? You follow your inclinations. If you follow your inclinations it's easy, isn't it? But this is the ease which causes suffering, like someone who can't be bothered working. He takes it easy, but when the time comes to eat he hasn't got anything. This is how it goes.

I've contended with many aspects of the Buddha's teaching in the past, but I couldn't really beat him. Nowadays I accept it. I accept that the many teachings of the Buddha are straight down the line, so I've taken those teachings and used them to train both myself and others.

The practice which is important is *patipadā*. What is *patipadā*? It is simply all our various activities: standing, walking, sitting, reclining and everything else. This is the *patipadā* of the body. Now the *patipadā* of the mind: how many times in the course of today have you felt low? How many times have you felt high? Have there been any noticeable feelings? We must know ourselves like this. Having seen those feelings, can we let go? Whatever we can't yet let go of, we must work with. When we see that we can't yet let go of some particular feeling, we must take it and examine it with wisdom. Reason it out. Work with it. This is practice. For example, when you are feeling zealous, practise, and when you feel lazy, try to continue the practice. If you can't continue at 'full speed' then at least do half as much. Don't just waste the day away by being lazy and not practising. Doing that will lead to disaster, it's not the way of a practitioner.

Now I've heard some people say, 'Oh, this year I was really in a bad way.'

'How come?'

'I was sick all year. I couldn't practise at all.'

Oh! If they don't practise when death is near, when will they ever practise? If they're feeling well, do you think they'll practise? No, they only get lost in happiness. If they're suffering they still don't practise, they get lost in that. I don't know when people think they're going to practise! They can only see that they're sick, in pain, almost dead from fever - that's right, bring it on heavy, that's where the practice is. When people are feeling happy it just goes to their heads and they get vain and conceited.

We must cultivate our practice. What this means is that whether you are happy or unhappy you must practise just the same. If you are feeling well you should practise, and if you are feeling sick you should also practise. There are those who think, 'This year I couldn't practise at all, I was sick the whole time'. If these people are feeling well, they just walk around singing songs. This is wrong thinking, not right thinking. This is why the practitioners of the past have all maintained the steady training of the heart. If things go wrong, just let them be with the body, not in the mind.

There was a time in my practice, after I had been practising about five years, when I felt that living with others was a hindrance. I would sit in my kutī and try to meditate and people would keep coming by for a chat and disturbing me. I ran off to live by myself. I thought I couldn't practise with those people bothering me. I was fed up, so I went to live in a small, deserted monastery in the forest, near a small village. I stayed there alone, speaking to no-one because there was nobody else to speak to.

After I'd been there about fifteen days the thought arose, 'Hmm. It would be good to have a novice or *pah-kow* here with me. He could help me out with some small jobs.' I knew it would come up, and sure enough, there it was!

'Hey! You're a real character! You say you're fed up with your friends, fed up with your fellow monks and novices, and now you want a novice. What's this?'

'No,' it says, 'I want a good novice.'

'There! Where are all the good people, can you find any? Where are you going to find a good person? In the whole monastery there were only no-good people. You must have been the only good person, to have run away like this!'

You have to follow it up like this, follow up the tracks of your thoughts until you see.

'Hmm. This is the important one. Where is there a good person to be found? There aren't any good people, you must find the good person within yourself. If you are good in yourself then wherever you go will be good. Whether

others criticize or praise you, you are still good. If you aren't good, then when others criticize you, you get angry, and when they praise you, you are pleased.

At that time I reflected on this and have found it to be true from that day on until the present. Goodness must be found within. As soon as I saw this, that feeling of wanting to run away disappeared. In later times, whenever I had that desire arise I let it go. Whenever it arose I was aware of it and kept my awareness on that. Thus I had a solid foundation. Wherever I lived, whether people condemned me or whatever they said, I would reflect that the point is not whether *they* were good or bad. Good or evil must be seen within ourselves. The way other people are, that's their concern.

Don't go thinking, 'Oh, today is too hot,' or, 'Today is too cold,' or, 'Today is ...' Whatever the day is like, that's just the way it is. Really, you are simply blaming the weather for your own laziness. We must see the Dhamma within ourselves, then there is a surer kind of peace.

So for all of you who have come to practise here, even though it's only for a few days, many things will arise. Many things may be arising which you're not even aware of. There is some right thinking, some wrong thinking - many, many things. So I say this practice is difficult.

Even though some of you may experience some peace when you sit in meditation, don't be in a hurry to congratulate yourselves. Likewise, if there is some confusion, don't blame yourselves. If things seem to be good, don't delight in them, and if they're not good don't be averse to them. Just look at it all, look at what you have. Just look, don't bother judging. If it's good, don't hold fast to it; if it's bad, don't cling to it. Good and bad can both bite, so don't hold fast to them.

The practice is simply to sit, sit and watch it all. Good moods and bad moods come and go as is their nature. Don't only praise your mind or only condemn it, know the right time for these things. When it's time for congratulations, congratulate it, but just a little, don't overdo it. Just like teaching a child, sometimes you may have to spank it a little. In our practice sometimes we may have to punish ourselves, but don't punish yourself all the time. If you punish yourself all the time, in a while you'll just give up the practice. But then you can't just give yourself a good time and take it easy either. That's not the way to practise. We practise according to the Middle Way. What is the Middle Way? This Middle Way is difficult to follow, you can't rely on your moods and desires.

Don't think that just sitting with your eyes closed is practise. If you do think this way then quickly change your thinking! Steady practice is having the attitude of practice while standing, walking, sitting and lying down. When

coming out of sitting meditation, reflect that you're simply changing postures. If you reflect in this way you will have peace. Wherever you are, you will have this attitude of practice with you constantly, you will have a steady awareness within yourself.

Those of you who, simply indulge in your moods, spending the whole day letting the mind wander where it wants, will find that the next evening in sitting meditation all you get is the 'backwash' from the day's aimless thinking. There is no foundation of calm because you have let it go cold all day. If you practise like this, your mind gets gradually further and further from the practice. When I ask some of my disciples, 'How is your meditation going?' They say, 'Oh, it's all gone now.' You see? They can keep it up for a month or two but in a year or two it's all finished.

Why is this? It's because they don't take this essential point into their practice. When they've finished sitting they let go of their samādhi. They start to sit for shorter and shorter periods, till they reach the point where as soon as they start to sit they want to finish. Eventually they don't even sit. It's the same with bowing to the Buddha image. At first they make the effort to prostrate every night before going to sleep, but after a while their minds begin to stray. Soon they don't bother to prostrate at all, they just nod, till eventually it's all gone. They throw out the practice completely.

Therefore, understand the importance of sati, practise constantly. Right practice is steady practice. Whether standing, walking, sitting or reclining, the practice must continue. This means that practice, meditation, is done in the mind, not in the body. If our mind has zeal, is conscientious and ardent, there will be awareness. The mind is the important thing. The mind is that which supervises everything we do.

When we understand properly, we practise properly. When we practise properly, we don't go astray. Even if we only do a little, that is still all right. For example, when you finish sitting in meditation, remind yourselves that you are not actually finishing meditation, you are simply changing postures. Your mind is still composed. Whether standing, walking, sitting or reclining, you have sati with you. If you have this kind of awareness you can maintain your internal practice. In the evening when you sit again the practice continues uninterrupted. Your effort is unbroken, allowing the mind to attain calm.

This is called steady practice. Whether we are talking or doing other things we should try to make the practice continuous. If our mind has recollection and self-awareness continuously, our practice will naturally develop, it will gradually come together. The mind will find peace, because it will know what is right and what is wrong. It will see what is happening within us and realize

peace.

If we are to develop *sīla* or *samādhi*, we must first have *paññā*. Some people think that they'll develop moral restraint one year, *samādhi* the next year and the year after that they'll develop wisdom. They think these three things are separate. They think that this year they will develop *sīla*, but if the mind is not firm (*samādhi*), how can they do it? If there is no understanding (*paññā*), how can they do it? Without *samādhi* or *paññā*, *sīla* will be sloppy.

In fact these three come together at the same point. When we have *sīla* we have *samādhi*, when we have *samādhi* we have *paññā*. They are all one, like a mango. Whether it's small or fully grown, it's still a mango. When it's ripe it's still the same mango. If we think in simple terms like this, we can see it more easily. We don't have to learn a lot of things, just know these things, know our practice.

When it comes to meditation some people don't get what they want, so they just give up, saying they don't yet have the merit to practise meditation. They can do bad things, they have that sort of talent, but they don't have the talent to do good. They give it up, saying they don't have a good enough foundation. This is the way people are, they side with their defilements.

Now that you have this chance to practise, please understand that whether you find it difficult or easy to develop *samādhi* it is entirely up to you, not the *samādhi*. If it is difficult, it is because you are practising wrongly. In our practice we must have 'right view' (*sammā-ditthi*). If our view is right, everything else is right: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right recollection, right concentration - the Eightfold Path. When there is right view all the other factors will follow.

Whatever happens, don't let your mind stray off the track. Look within yourself and you will see clearly. As I see it, for the best practice, it isn't necessary to read many books. Take all the books and lock them away. Just read your own mind. You have all been burying yourselves in books from the time you entered school. I think that now you have this opportunity and have the time, take the books, put them in a cupboard and lock the door. Just read your mind.

Whenever something arises within the mind, whether you like it or not, whether it seems right or wrong, just cut it off with, 'this is not a sure thing.' Whatever arises just cut it down, 'not sure, not sure.' With just this single axe you can cut it all down. It's all 'not sure'.

For the duration of this next month that you will be staying in this forest monastery, you should make a lot of headway. You will see the truth. This 'not sure' is really an important one. This one develops wisdom. The more

you look, the more you will see ‘not sure-ness’. After you’ve cut something off with ‘not sure’ it may come circling round and pop up again. Yes, it’s truly ‘not sure’. Whatever pops up just stick this one label on it all - ‘not sure’. You stick the sign on, ‘not sure’, and in a while, when its turn comes, it crops up again, ‘Ah, not sure.’ Dig here! Not sure. You will see this same old one who’s been fooling you month in, month out, year in, year out, from the day you were born. There’s only this one who’s been fooling you all along. See this and realize the way things are.

When your practice reaches this point you won’t cling to sensations, because they are all uncertain. Have you ever noticed? Maybe you see a clock and think, ‘Oh, this is nice.’ Buy it and see - in not many days you’re bored with it already. ‘This pen is really beautiful,’ so you take the trouble to buy one. In not many months you tire of it. This is how it is. Where is there any certainty?

If we see all these things as uncertain, their value fades away. All things become insignificant. Why should we hold on to things that have no value? We keep them only as we might keep an old rag to wipe our feet with. We see all sensations as equal in value because they all have the same nature.

When we understand sensations we understand the world. The world is sensations and sensations are the world. If we aren’t fooled by sensations, we aren’t fooled by the world. If we aren’t fooled by the world, we aren’t fooled by sensations.

The mind which sees this will have a firm foundation of wisdom. Such a mind will not have many problems. Any problems it does have, it can solve. When there are no more problems there are no more doubts. Peace arises in their stead. This is called ‘practice’. If we really practise it must be like this.

¹: One of the many branch monasteries of Ajahn Chah’s main monastery, Wat Pah Pong.

²: The play on words here between the Thai ‘*patibat*’ (practice) and ‘*wibut*’ (disaster) is lost in the English.

³: These are the two extremes pointed out as wrong paths by the Buddha in his First Discourse. They are normally rendered as ‘indulgence in sense pleasures’ and ‘self-mortification’.

Detachment Within Activity

Take a look at the example of the Buddha. Both in his own practice and in his methods for teaching the disciples he was exemplary. The Buddha taught the standards of practice as skilful means for getting rid of conceit. He couldn't do the practice for us. Having heard that teaching, we must further teach ourselves, practise for ourselves. The results will arise here, not at the teaching.

The Buddha's teaching can only enable us to get an initial understanding of the Dhamma, but the Dhamma is not yet within our hearts. Why not? Because we haven't yet practised, we haven't yet taught ourselves. The Dhamma arises within the practice. If you know it, you know it through the practice. If you doubt it, you doubt it in the practice. Teachings from the Masters may be true, but simply listening to Dhamma is not yet enough to enable us to realize it. The teaching simply points out the way to realizing the Dhamma. To realize the Dhamma we must take that teaching and bring it into our hearts. That part which is for the body we apply to the body, that part which is for speech we apply to speech, and that part which is for the mind we apply to the mind. This means that after hearing the teaching we must further teach ourselves to know that Dhamma, to be that Dhamma.

The Buddha said that those who simply believe others are not truly wise. A wise person practises until he is one with the Dhamma, until he can have confidence in himself, independent of others.

On one occasion, while Venerable Sāriputta was sitting at the Buddha's feet, listening respectfully as the Buddha expounded the Dhamma, the Buddha turned to him and asked,

‘Sāriputta, do you believe this teaching?’

Venerable Sāriputta replied, ‘No, I don't yet believe it.’

Now this is a good illustration. Venerable Sāriputta listened, and he took note. When he said he didn't yet believe he wasn't being careless, he was speaking the truth. He simply took note of that teaching, because he had not yet developed his own understanding of it, so he told the Buddha that he didn't yet believe - because he really didn't believe. These words almost sound as if Venerable Sāriputta was being rude, but actually he wasn't. He spoke the truth, and the Buddha praised him for it.

‘Good, good, Sāriputta. A wise person doesn't readily believe. He should consider first before believing.’

Conviction in a belief can take various forms. One form reasons according to

Dhamma, while another form is contrary to the Dhamma. This second way is heedless, it is a foolhardy understanding, *micchā-ditthi*, wrong view. One doesn't listen to anybody else.

Take the example of Dīghanakha the Brāhman. This Brāhman only believed himself, he wouldn't believe others. At one time when the Buddha was resting at Rājagaha, Dīghanakha went to listen to his teaching. Or you might say that Dīghanakha went to teach the Buddha because he was intent on expounding his own views.

'I am of the view that nothing suits me.'

This was his view. The Buddha listened to Dīghanakha's view and then answered,

'Brāhman, this view of yours doesn't suit you either.'

When the Buddha had answered in this way, Dīghanakha was stumped. He didn't know what to say. The Buddha explained in many ways, till the Brāhman understood. He stopped to reflect and saw.

'Hmm, this view of mine isn't right.'

On hearing the Buddha's answer the Brāhman abandoned his conceited views and immediately saw the truth. He changed right then and there, turning right around, just as one would invert one's hand. He praised the teaching of the Buddha thus:

'Listening to the Blessed One's teaching, my mind was illumined, just as one living in darkness might perceive light. My mind is like an overturned basin which has been uprighted, like a man who has been lost and finds the way.'

Now at that time a certain knowledge arose within his mind, within that mind which had been uprighted. Wrong view vanished and right view took its place. Darkness disappeared and light arose.

The Buddha declared that the Brāhman Dīghanakha was one who had opened the Dhamma Eye. Previously Dīghanakha clung to his own views and had no intention of changing them. But when he heard the Buddha's teaching his mind saw the truth, he saw that his clinging to those views was wrong. When the right understanding arose, he was able to perceive his previous understanding as mistaken, so he compared his experience with a person living in darkness who had found light. This is how it is. At that time the Brāhman Dīghanakha transcended his wrong view.

Now we must change in this way. Before we can give up defilements, we must change our perspective. We must begin to practise correctly and practise well. Previously we didn't practise rightly or well, and yet we thought we

were right and good just the same. When we really look into the matter we upright ourselves, just like turning over one's hand. This means that the 'one who knows', or wisdom, arises in the mind, so that it is able to see things anew. A new kind of awareness arises.

Therefore, practitioners must develop this knowing, which we call *Buddho*, the one who knows, in their minds. Originally the one who knows is not there, our knowledge is not clear, true or complete. This knowledge is therefore too weak to train the mind. But then the mind changes, or inverts, as a result of this awareness, called 'wisdom' or 'insight', which exceeds our previous awareness. That previous 'one who knows' did not yet know fully and so was unable to bring us to our objective.

The Buddha therefore taught to look within, *opanayiko*. Look within, don't look outwards. Or if you look outwards, then look within to see the cause and effect therein. Look for the truth in all things, because external objects and internal objects are always affecting each other. Our practice is to develop a certain type of awareness until it becomes stronger than our previous awareness. This causes wisdom and insight to arise within the mind, enabling us to clearly know the workings of the mind, the language of the mind and the ways and means of all the defilements.

The Buddha, when he first left his home in search of liberation, was probably not really sure what to do, much like us. He tried many ways to develop his wisdom. He looked for teachers, such as Uddaka Rāmaputta to practise meditation - right leg on left leg, right hand on left hand, body erect, eyes closed, letting go of everything until he was able to attain a high level of absorption (*samādhi*).¹ But when he came out of that *samādhi* his old thinking came up and he would attach to it just as before. Seeing this, he knew that wisdom had not yet arisen. His understanding had not yet penetrated to the truth, it was still incomplete, still lacking. Seeing this he nonetheless gained some understanding - that this was not yet the summation of practice - but he left that place to look for a new teacher.

When the Buddha left his old teacher he didn't condemn him, he did as the bee does, it takes nectar from the flower without damaging the petals.

The Buddha then proceeded to study with Ālāra Kālāma and attained an even higher state of *samādhi*, but when he came out of that state Bimba and Rāhula² came back into his thoughts again, the old memories and feelings came up again. He still had lust and desire. Reflecting inward he saw that he still hadn't reached his goal, so he left that teacher also. He listened to his teachers and did his best to follow their teachings. He continually reviewed the results of his practice; he didn't simply do things and then discard them

for something else.

Then, after trying ascetic practices, he realized that starving until one is almost a skeleton is simply a matter for the body. The body doesn't know anything. Practising in that way was like executing an innocent person while ignoring the real thief.

When the Buddha really looked into the matter he saw that practise is not a concern of the body, it is a concern of the mind. The Buddha had tried *Attakilamathānuyogo* (self-mortification) and found that it was limited to the body. In fact, all Buddhas are enlightened in mind.

Whether in regard to the body or to the mind, just throw them all together as transient, imperfect and ownerless - *aniccam* , *dukkham* and *anattā*. They are simply conditions of nature. They arise depending on supporting factors, exist for a while and then cease. When there are appropriate conditions they arise again; having arisen they exist for a while, then cease once more. These things are not a 'self', a 'being', an 'us' or a 'them'. There's nobody there, there are simply feelings. Happiness has no intrinsic self, suffering has no intrinsic self. No self can be found, there are simply elements of nature which arise, exist and cease. They go through this constant cycle of change.

All beings, including humans, tend to see the arising as themselves, the existence as themselves, and the cessation as themselves. Thus they cling to everything. They don't want things to be the way they are, they don't want them to be otherwise. For instance, having arisen they don't want things to cease; having experienced happiness, they don't want suffering. If suffering does arise they want it to go away as quickly as possible, but it is even better if it doesn't arise at all. This is because they see this body and mind as themselves, or belonging to themselves, and so they demand those things to follow their wishes.

This sort of thinking is like building a dam or a dyke without making an outlet to let the water through. The result is that the dam bursts. And so it is with this kind of thinking. The Buddha saw that thinking in this way is the cause of suffering. Seeing this cause, the Buddha gave it up.

This is the Noble Truth of the cause of suffering. The truths of suffering, its cause, its cessation and the way leading to that cessation - people are stuck right here. If people are to overcome their doubts, it's right at this point. Seeing that these things are simply *rūpa* and *nāma*, or corporeality and mentality, it becomes obvious that they are not a being, a person, an 'us', or a 'them'. They simply follow the laws of nature.

Our practice is to know things in this way. We don't have the power to really control these things, we aren't really their owners. Trying to control them

causes suffering, because they aren't really ours to control. Neither body nor mind are 'self' or 'other'. If we know this as it really is, then we see clearly. We see the truth, we are at one with it. It's like seeing a lump of red hot iron which has been heated in a furnace. It's hot all over. Whether we touch it on top, the bottom or the sides it's hot. No matter where we touch it, it's hot. This is how you should see things.

Mostly when we start to practise we want to attain, to achieve, to know and to see, but we don't yet know what it is we're going to achieve or know. There was once a disciple of mine whose practice was plagued with confusion and doubts. But he kept practising, and I kept instructing him, till he began to find some peace. But when he eventually became a bit calm he got caught up in his doubts again, saying, 'What do I do next?' There! The confusion arises again. He says he wants peace but when he gets it, he doesn't want it, he asks what he should do next!

So in this practice we must do everything with detachment. How are we to detach? We detach by seeing things clearly. Know the characteristics of the body and mind as they are. We meditate in order to find peace, but in doing so we see that which is not peaceful. This is because movement is the nature of the mind.

When practising samādhi we fix our attention on the in-breath and out-breath at the nose tip or the upper lip. This 'lifting' the mind to fix it is called *vitakka*, or 'lifting up'. When we have thus 'lifted' the mind and are fixed on an object, this is called *vicāra*, the contemplation of the breath at the nose tip. This quality of *vicāra* will naturally mingle with other mental sensations, and we may think that our mind is not still, that it won't calm down, but actually this is simply the workings of *vicāra* as it mingles with those sensations. Now if this goes too far in the wrong direction, our mind will lose its collectedness. So then we must set up the mind afresh, lifting it up to the object of concentration with *vitakka*. As soon as we have thus established our attention *vicāra* takes over, mingling with the various mental sensations.

Now when we see this happening, our lack of understanding may lead us to wonder: 'Why has my mind wandered? I wanted it to be still, why isn't it still?' This is practising with attachment.

Actually the mind is simply following its nature, but we go and add on to that activity by wanting the mind to be still and thinking, 'Why isn't it still?' Aversion arises and so we add that on to everything else, increasing our doubts, increasing our suffering and increasing our confusion. So if there is *vicāra*, reflecting on the various happenings within the mind in this way, we should wisely consider, 'Ah, the mind is simply like this.' There, that's the one who knows talking, telling you to see things as they are. The mind is

simply like this. We let it go at that and the mind becomes peaceful. When it's no longer centred we bring up *vitakka* once more, and shortly there is calm again. *Vitakka* and *vicāra* work together like this. We use *vicāra* to contemplate the various sensations which arise. When *vicāra* becomes gradually more scattered we once again 'lift' our attention with *vitakka*.

The important thing here is that our practice at this point must be done with detachment. Seeing the process of *vicāra* interacting with the mental sensations we may think that the mind is confused and become averse to this process. This is the cause right here. We aren't happy simply because we want the mind to be still. This is the cause - wrong view. If we correct our view just a little, seeing this activity as simply the nature of mind, just this is enough to subdue the confusion. This is called letting go.

Now, if we don't attach, if we practise with 'letting go' - detachment within activity and activity within detachment - if we learn to practise like this, then *vicāra* will naturally tend to have less to work with. If our mind ceases to be disturbed, then *vicāra* will incline to contemplating Dhamma, because if we don't contemplate Dhamma, the mind returns to distraction.

So there is *vitakka* then *vicāra*, *vitakka* then *vicāra*, *vitakka* then *vicāra* and so on, until *vicāra* becomes gradually more subtle. At first *vicāra* goes all over the place. When we understand this as simply the natural activity of the mind, it won't bother us unless we attach to it. It's like flowing water. If we get obsessed with it, asking 'Why does it flow?' then naturally we suffer. If we understand that the water simply flows because that's its nature, then there's no suffering. *Vicāra* is like this. There is *vitakka*, then *vicāra*, interacting with mental sensations. We can take these sensations as our object of meditation, calming the mind by noting those sensations.

If we know the nature of the mind like this, then we let go, just like letting the water flow by. *Vicāra* becomes more and more subtle. Perhaps the mind inclines to contemplating the body, or death for instance, or some other theme of Dhamma. When the theme of contemplation is right, there will arise a feeling of well-being. What is that well-being? It is *pīti* (rapture). *Pīti*, well-being, arises. It may manifest as goose-pimples, coolness or lightness. The mind is enraptured. This is called *pīti*. There is also pleasure, *sukha*, the coming and going of various sensations; and the state of *ekaggatārammana*, or one-pointedness.

Now if we talk in terms of the first stage of concentration, it must be like this: *vitakka*, *vicāra*, *pīti*, *sukha*, *ekaggatā*. So what is the second stage like? As the mind becomes progressively more subtle, *vitakka* and *vicāra* become comparatively coarser, so that they are discarded, leaving only *pīti*, *sukha*, and *ekaggatā*. This is something that the mind does of itself, we don't have to

conjecture about it, we just know things as they are.

As the mind becomes more refined, *pīti* is eventually thrown off, leaving only *sukha* and *ekaggatā*, and so we take note of that. Where does *pīti* go to? It doesn't go anywhere, it's just that the mind becomes increasingly more subtle so that it throws off those qualities that are too coarse for it. Whatever is too coarse it throws out, and it keeps throwing off like this until it reaches the peak of subtlety, known in the books as the fourth *jhāna*, the highest level of absorption. Here the mind has progressively discarded whatever becomes too coarse for it, until only *ekaggatā* and *upekkhā*, equanimity remain. There's nothing further, this is the limit.

When the mind is developing the stages of *samādhi* it must proceed in this way, but please let us understand the basics of practice. We want to make the mind still but it won't be still. This is practising out of desire, but we don't realize it. We have the desire for calm. The mind is already disturbed and then we further disturb things by wanting to make it calm. This very wanting is the cause. We don't see that this wanting to calm the mind is *tanhā*. It's just like increasing the burden. The more we desire calm the more disturbed the mind becomes, until we just give up. We end up fighting all the time, sitting and struggling with ourselves.

Why is this? Because we don't reflect back on how we have set up the mind. Know that the conditions of mind are simply the way they are. Whatever arises, just observe it. It is simply the nature of the mind; it isn't harmful unless we don't understand its nature. It's not dangerous if we see its activity for what it is. So we practise with *vitakka* and *vicāra* until the mind begins to settle down and becomes less forceful. When sensations arise we contemplate them, we mingle with them and come to know them.

However, usually we tend to start fighting with them, because right from the beginning we're determined to calm the mind. As soon as we sit, the thoughts come to bother us. As soon as we set up our meditation object our attention wanders, the mind wanders off following all the thoughts, thinking that those thoughts have come to disturb us, but actually the problem arises right here, from the very wanting to calm the mind.

If we see that the mind is simply behaving according to its nature, that it naturally comes and goes like this, and if we don't get over-interested in it, we can understand that its ways are much the same as a child. Children don't know any better, they may say all kinds of things. If we understand them we just let them talk, because children naturally talk like that. When we let go like this, we are not obsessed with the child. We can talk to our guests undisturbed, while the child chatters and plays around. The mind is like this. It's not harmful unless we grab on to it and get obsessed over it. That's the

real cause of trouble.

When *pīti* arises one feels an indescribable pleasure, which only those who experience it can appreciate. *Sukha* (pleasure) arises, and there is also the quality of one-pointedness. There is *vitakka*, *vicāra*, *pīti*, *sukha* and *ekaggatā*. These five qualities all converge at one place. Even though they are different qualities they are all collected in one place, and we can see them all there, just like seeing many different kinds of fruit in one bowl. *Vitakka*, *vicāra*, *pīti*, *sukha* and *ekaggatā* - we can see them all in one mind, all five qualities. If one were to ask, 'How is there *vitakka*, how is there *vicāra*, how is there *pīti* and *sukha*? 'It would be difficult to answer, but when they converge in the mind we will see how it is for ourselves.

At this point our practice becomes somewhat special. We must have recollection and self-awareness and not lose ourselves. Know things for what they are. These are stages of meditation, the potential of the mind. Don't doubt anything with regard to the practice. Even if you sink into the earth or fly into the air, or even 'die' while sitting, don't doubt it. Whatever the qualities of the mind are, just stay with the knowing. This is our foundation: to have sati, recollection, and *sampajañña*, self-awareness, whether standing, walking, sitting, or reclining. Whatever arises, just leave it be, don't cling to it. Whether it's like or dislike, happiness or suffering, doubt or certainty, contemplate with *vicāra* and gauge the results of those qualities. Don't try to label everything, just know it. See that all the things that arise in the mind are simply sensations. They are transient. They arise, exist and cease. That's all there is to them, they have no self or being, they are neither 'us' nor 'them'. None of them are worthy of clinging to.

When we see all *rūpa* and *nāma* in this way with wisdom, then we will see the old tracks. We will see the transience of the mind, the transience of the body, the transience of happiness, suffering, love and hate. They are all impermanent. Seeing this, the mind becomes weary; weary of the body and mind, weary of the things that arise and cease and their transience. When the mind becomes disenchanted it will look for a way out of all those things. It no longer wants to be stuck in things, it sees the inadequacy of this world and the inadequacy of birth.

When the mind sees like this, wherever we go, we see *aniccam* (transience), *dukkham* (imperfection) and *anattā* (ownerlessness). There's nothing left to hold on to. Whether we sit at the foot of a tree, on a mountain top or in a valley, we can hear the Buddha's teaching. All trees will seem as one, all beings will be as one, there's nothing special about any of them. They arise, exist for a while, age and then die, all of them.

We thus see the world more clearly, we see this body and mind more clearly.

They are clearer in the light of transience, clearer in the light of imperfection and clearer in the light of ownerlessness. If people hold fast to things, they suffer. This is how suffering arises. If we see that body and mind are simply the way they are, no suffering arises, because we don't hold fast to them. Wherever we go we will have wisdom. Even when seeing a tree we can consider it with wisdom. Seeing grass and the various insects will be food for reflection.

When it all comes down to it, they all fall into the same boat. They are all Dhamma, they are invariably transient. This is the truth, this is the true Dhamma, this is certain. How is it certain? It is certain in that the world is that way and can never be otherwise. There's nothing more to it than this. If we can see in this way, we have finished our journey.

In Buddhism, with regard to view, it is said that to feel that we are more foolish than others is not right; to feel that we are equal to others is not right; and to feel that we are better than others is not right, because there isn't any 'we'. This is how it is, we must uproot conceit.

This is called *lokavidū* - knowing the world clearly as it is. If we thus see the truth, the mind will know itself completely and will sever the cause of suffering. When there is no longer any cause, the results can not arise. This is the way our practice should proceed.

The basics which we need to develop are: firstly, to be upright and honest; secondly, to be wary of wrongdoing; thirdly, to have the attribute of humility within our heart, to be aloof and content with little. If we are content with little in regards to speech and all other things, we will see ourselves, we won't be drawn into distractions. The mind will have a foundation of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*.

Therefore, practitioners of the path should not be careless. Even if you are right, don't be careless. And if you are wrong, don't be careless. If things are going well or you're feeling happy, don't be careless. Why do I say 'don't be careless'? Because all of these things are uncertain. Note them as such. If you get peaceful just leave the peace be. You may really want to indulge in it but you should simply know the truth of it, the same as for unpleasant qualities.

This practice of the mind is up to each individual. The teacher only explains the way to train the mind, because that mind is within each individual. We know what's in there, nobody else can know our mind as well as we can. The practice requires this kind of honesty. Do it properly, don't do it half-heartedly. When I say 'do it properly,' does that mean you have to exhaust yourselves? No, you don't have to exhaust yourselves, because the practice is done in the mind. If you know this, you will know the practice. You don't

need a whole lot. Just use the standards of practice to reflect on yourself inwardly.

Now the Rains Retreat is half way over. For most people it's normal to let the practice slacken off after a while. They aren't consistent from beginning to end. This shows that their practice is not yet mature. For instance, having determined a particular practice at the beginning of the retreat, whatever it may be, then we must fulfil that resolution. For these three months make the practice consistent. You must all try. Whatever you have determined to practise, consider that and reflect whether the practice has slackened off. If so, make an effort to re-establish it. Keep shaping up the practice, just the same as when we practise meditation on the breath. As the breath goes in and out the mind gets distracted. Then re-establish your attention on the breath. When your attention wanders off again bring it back once more. This is the same. In regard to both the body and the mind the practice proceeds like this. Please make an effort with it.

¹: The level of nothingness, one of the 'formless absorptions', sometimes called the seventh *jhāna*, or absorption.

²: Bimba, or Princess Yasodharā, the Buddha's former wife; Rāhula, his son.

Training This Mind

Training this mind - actually there's nothing much to this mind. It's simply radiant in and of itself. It's naturally peaceful. Why the mind doesn't feel peaceful right now is because it gets lost in its own moods. There's nothing to the mind itself. It simply abides in its natural state, that's all. That sometimes the mind feels peaceful and other times not peaceful is because it has been tricked by these moods. The untrained mind lacks wisdom. It's foolish. Moods come and trick it into feeling pleasure one minute and suffering the next. Happiness then sadness. But the natural state of a person's mind isn't one of happiness or sadness. This experience of happiness and sadness is not the actual mind itself, but just these moods which have tricked it. The mind gets lost, carried away by these moods with no idea what's happening. And as a result, we experience pleasure and pain accordingly, because the mind has not been trained yet. It still isn't very clever. And we go on thinking that it's our mind which is suffering or our mind which is happy, when actually it's just lost in its various moods.

The point is that really this mind of ours is naturally peaceful. It's still and calm like a leaf that is not being blown about by the wind. But if the wind blows, then it flutters. It does that because of the wind. And so with the mind it's because of these moods - getting caught up with thoughts. If the mind didn't get lost in these moods, it wouldn't flutter about. If it understood the nature of thoughts, it would just stay still. This is called the natural state of the mind. And why we have come to practise now is to see the mind in this original state. We think that the mind itself is actually pleasurable or peaceful. But really the mind has not created any real pleasure or pain. These thoughts have come and tricked it and it has got caught up in them. So we really have to come and train our minds in order to grow in wisdom. So that we understand the true nature of thoughts rather than just following them blindly.

The mind is naturally peaceful. It's in order to understand just this much that we have come together to do this difficult practice of meditation.

Tranquillity and Insight

To calm the mind means to find the right balance. If you try to force your mind too much it goes too far; if you don't try enough it doesn't get there, it misses the point of balance.

Normally the mind isn't still, it's moving all the time. We must strengthen the mind. Making the mind strong and making the body strong are not the same. To make the body strong we have to exercise it, to push it, but to make the mind strong means to make it peaceful, not to go thinking of this and that. For most of us the mind has never been peaceful, it has never had the energy of samādhi; so we must establish it within a boundary. We sit in meditation, staying with the 'one who knows'.

If we force our breath to be too long or too short, we're not balanced, the mind won't become peaceful. It's like when we first start to use a pedal sewing machine. At first we just practise pedalling the machine to get our coordination right, before we actually sew anything. Following the breath is similar. We don't get concerned over how long or short, weak or strong it is, we just note it. We simply let it be, following the natural breathing.

When our breathing is balanced, we take it as our meditation object. When we breathe in, the beginning of the breath is at the nose tip, the middle of the breath at the chest and the end of the breath at the abdomen. This is the path of the breath. When we breathe out, the beginning of the breath is at the abdomen, the middle at the chest and the end at the nose-tip. Simply take note of this path of the breath at the nose tip, the chest and the abdomen, then at the abdomen, the chest and the tip of the nose. We take note of these three points in order to make the mind firm, to limit mental activity so that mindfulness and self-awareness can easily arise.

When our attention settles on these three points, we can let them go and note the in and out breathing, concentrating solely at the nose tip or the upper lip, where the air passes on its in and out passage. We don't have to follow the breath, we just establish mindfulness in front of us at the nose tip, and note the breath at this one point - entering, leaving, entering, leaving.

There's no need to think of anything special, just concentrate on this simple task for now, having continuous presence of mind. There's nothing more to do, just breath in and out. Soon the mind becomes peaceful, the breath refined. The mind and body become light. This is the right state for the work of meditation.

When sitting in meditation the mind becomes refined, but we should try to be aware, to know whatever state it's in. Mental activity is there together with

tranquillity. There is *vitakka*. *Vitakka* is the action of bringing the mind to the theme of contemplation. If there is not much mindfulness, there will not be much *vitakka*. Then *vicāra*, the contemplation around that theme, follows. Various weak mental impressions may arise from time to time but our self-awareness is the important thing - whatever may be happening we know it continuously. As we go deeper we are constantly aware of the state of our meditation, knowing whether or not the mind is firmly established. Thus, both concentration and awareness are present.

Having a peaceful mind does not mean that there's nothing happening, mental impressions do arise. For instance, when we talk about the first level of absorption, we say it has five factors. Along with *vitakka* and *vicāra*, *pīti* arises with the theme of contemplation and then *sukha*. These four things all lie together in the mind that is established in tranquillity. They are as one state.

The fifth factor is *ekaggatā* or one-pointedness. You may wonder how there can be one-pointedness when there are all these other factors as well. This is because they all become unified on that foundation of tranquillity. Together they are called a state of *samādhi*. They are not everyday states of mind, they are factors of absorption. There are these five characteristics, but they do not disturb the basic tranquillity. There is *vitakka*, but it does not disturb the mind; *vicāra*, rapture and happiness arise but do not disturb the mind. The mind is therefore as one with these factors. The first level of absorption is like this.

We don't have to call it first *jhāna*, second *jhāna*, third *jhāna* and so on, let's just call it 'a peaceful mind'. As the mind becomes progressively calmer it will dispense with *vitakka* and *vicāra*, leaving only rapture and happiness. Why does the mind discard *vitakka* and *vicāra*? This is because, as the mind becomes more refined, the activities of *vitakka* and *vicāra* are too coarse to remain. At this stage, as the mind leaves off *vitakka* and *vicāra*, feelings of great rapture can arise, tears may gush out. But as the *samādhi* deepens, rapture too is discarded, leaving only happiness and one-pointedness, until finally even happiness goes and the mind reaches its greatest refinement. There is only equanimity and one-pointedness, all else has been left behind. The mind stands unmoving.

Once the mind is peaceful this can happen. You don't have to think a lot about it; it just happens by itself when the causal factors are ripe. This is called the energy of a peaceful mind. In this state the mind is not drowsy; the five hindrances (sense desire, aversion, restlessness, dullness and doubt) have all fled.

But if mental energy is still not strong and mindfulness is weak, there will occasionally arise intruding mental impressions. The mind is peaceful but it's

as if there's a 'cloudiness' within the calm. It's not a normal sort of drowsiness though, some impressions will manifest - maybe we'll hear a sound or see a dog or something. It's not really clear but it's not a dream either. This is because these five factors have become unbalanced and weak.

The mind tends to play tricks within these levels of tranquillity. 'Imagery' will sometimes arise when the mind is in this state, through any of the senses, and the meditator may not be able to tell exactly what is happening. 'Am I sleeping? No. Is it a dream? No, it's not a dream.' These impressions arise from a middling sort of tranquillity; but if the mind is truly calm and clear we don't doubt the various mental impressions or imagery which arise. Questions like, 'Did I drift off then? Was I sleeping? Did I get lost?' don't arise, for they are characteristics of a mind which is still doubting. 'Am I asleep or awake?' Here, the mind is fuzzy. This is the mind getting lost in its moods. It's like the moon going behind a cloud. You can still see the moon but the clouds covering it render it hazy. It's not like the moon which has emerged from behind the clouds clear, sharp and bright.

When the mind is peaceful and established firmly in mindfulness and self-awareness, there will be no doubt concerning the various phenomena which we encounter. The mind will truly be beyond the hindrances. We will clearly know everything which arises in the mind as it is. We do not doubt because the mind is clear and bright. The mind which reaches samādhi is like this.

Some people find it hard to enter samādhi because they don't have the right tendencies. There is samādhi, but it's not strong or firm. However, one can attain peace through the use of wisdom, through contemplating and seeing the truth of things, solving problems that way. This is using wisdom rather than the power of samādhi. To attain calm in practice, it's not necessary to be sitting in meditation. For instance, just ask yourself, 'Eh, what is that?' and solve your problem right there! A person with wisdom is like this. Perhaps he can't really attain high levels of samādhi, although there must be some concentration, just enough to cultivate wisdom. It's like the difference between farming rice and farming corn. One can depend on rice more than corn for one's livelihood. Our practice can be like this, we depend more on wisdom to solve problems. When we see the truth, peace arises.

The two ways are not the same. Some people have insight and are strong in wisdom but do not have much samādhi. When they sit in meditation they aren't very peaceful. They tend to think a lot, contemplating this and that, until eventually they contemplate happiness and suffering and see the truth of them. Some incline more towards this than samādhi. Whether standing, walking, sitting or lying, enlightenment of the Dhamma can take place. Through seeing, through relinquishing, they attain peace. They attain peace

through knowing the truth, through going beyond doubt, because they have seen it for themselves.

Other people have only little wisdom but their samādhi is very strong. They can enter very deep samādhi quickly, but not having much wisdom, they can not catch their defilements; they don't know them. They can't solve their problems. But regardless of whichever approach we use, we must do away with wrong thinking, leaving only right view. We must get rid of confusion, leaving only peace. Either way we end up at the same place. There are these two sides to practice, but these two things, calm and insight, go together. We can't do away with either of them. They must go together.

That which 'looks over' the various factors which arise in meditation is sati, mindfulness. This sati is a condition which, through practise, can help other factors to arise. Sati is life. Whenever we don't have sati, when we are heedless, it's as if we are dead. If we have no sati, then our speech and actions have no meaning. Sati is simply recollection. It's a cause for the arising of self-awareness and wisdom. Whatever virtues we have cultivated are imperfect if lacking in sati. Sati is that which watches over us while standing, walking, sitting and lying. Even when we are no longer in samādhi, sati should be present throughout.

Whatever we do, we take care. A sense of shame¹ will arise. We will feel ashamed about the things we do which aren't correct. As shame increases, our collectedness will increase as well. When collectedness increases, heedlessness will disappear. Even if we don't sit in meditation, these factors will be present in the mind.

And this arises because of cultivating sati. Develop sati! This is the quality which looks over the work we are doing in the present. It has real value. We should know ourselves at all times. If we know ourselves like this, right will distinguish itself from wrong, the path will become clear, and the cause for all shame will dissolve. Wisdom will arise.

We can bring the practice all together as morality, concentration and wisdom. To be collected, to be controlled, this is morality. The firm establishing of the mind within that control is concentration. Complete, overall knowledge within the activity in which we are engaged is wisdom. The practice in brief is just morality, concentration and wisdom, or in other words, the path. There is no other way.

¹: This is a wholesome sense of shame based on knowledge of cause and effect, rather than emotional guilt.

The Path in Harmony

Today I would like to ask you all: 'are you sure yet, are you certain in your meditation practice?' I ask because these days there are many people teaching meditation, both monks and laypeople, and I'm afraid you may be subject to wavering and doubt. If we understand clearly, we will be able to make the mind peaceful and firm.

You should understand the eightfold path as morality, concentration and wisdom. The path comes together as simply this. Our practice is to make this path arise within us.

When sitting in meditation we are told to close our eyes, not to look at anything else, because now we are going to look directly at the mind. When we close our eyes, our attention comes inwards. We establish our attention on the breath, centre our feelings there, put our mindfulness there. When the factors of the path are in harmony we will be able to see the breath, the feelings, the mind and mental objects for what they are. Here we will see the 'focus point', where samādhi and the other factors of the path converge in harmony.

When we are sitting in meditation, following the breath, think to yourself that now you are sitting alone. There is no one sitting around you, there is nothing at all. Develop this feeling that you are sitting alone until the mind lets go of all externals, concentrating solely on the breath. If you are thinking, 'This person is sitting over here, that person is sitting over there,' there is no peace, the mind doesn't come inwards. Just cast all that aside until you feel there is no one sitting around you, until there is nothing at all, until you have no wavering or interest in your surroundings.

Let the breath go naturally, don't force it to be short or long or whatever, just sit and watch it going in and out. When the mind lets go of all external impressions, the sounds of cars and such will not disturb you. Nothing, whether sights or sounds, will disturb you, because the mind doesn't receive them. Your attention will come together on the breath.

If the mind is confused and won't concentrate on the breath, take a full, deep breath, as deep as you can, and then let it all out till there is none left. Do this three times and then re-establish your attention. The mind will become calm.

It's natural for it to be calm for a while, and then restlessness and confusion may arise again. When this happens, concentrate, breathe deeply again, and then re-establish your attention on the breath. Just keep going like this. When this has happened many times you will become adept at it. The mind will let go of all external manifestations. External impressions will not reach the

mind. Sati will be firmly established.

As the mind becomes more refined, so does the breath. Feelings will become finer and finer, the body and mind will be light. Our attention is solely on the inner, we see the in-breaths and out-breaths clearly, we see all impressions clearly. Here we will see the coming together of morality, concentration and wisdom. This is called the path in harmony. When there is this harmony our mind will be free of confusion, it will come together as one. This is called samādhi.

After watching the breath for a long time, it may become very refined; the awareness of the breath will gradually cease, leaving only bare awareness. The breath may become so refined it disappears! Perhaps we are ‘just sitting’, as if there is no breathing at all. Actually there is breathing, but it seems as if there’s none. This is because the mind has reached its most refined state, there is just bare awareness. It has gone beyond the breath. The knowledge that the breath has disappeared becomes established. What will we take as our object of meditation now? We take just this knowledge as our object, that is, the awareness that there’s no breath.

Unexpected things may happen at this time; some people experience them, some don’t. If they do arise, we should be firm and have strong mindfulness. Some people see that the breath has disappeared and get a fright, they’re afraid they might die. Here we should know the situation just as it is. We simply notice that there’s no breath and take that as our object of awareness.

This, we can say, is the firmest, surest type of samādhi: there is only one firm, unmoving state of mind. Perhaps the body will become so light it’s as if there is no body at all. We feel like we’re sitting in empty space, completely empty. Although this may seem very unusual, you should understand that there’s nothing to worry about. Firmly establish your mind like this.

When the mind is firmly unified, having no sense impressions to disturb it, one can remain in that state for any length of time. There will be no painful feelings to disturb us. When samādhi has reached this level, we can leave it when we choose, but if we come out of this samādhi, we do so comfortably, not because we’ve become bored with it or tired. We come out because we’ve had enough for now, we feel at ease; we have no problems at all.

If we can develop this type of samādhi, then if we sit, say, thirty minutes or an hour, the mind will be cool and calm for many days. When the mind is cool and calm like this, it is clean. Whatever we experience, the mind will take up and investigate. This is a fruit of samādhi.

Morality has one function, concentration has another function and wisdom another. These factors are like a cycle. We can see them all within the

peaceful mind. When the mind is calm it has collectedness and restraint because of wisdom and the energy of concentration. As it becomes more collected it becomes more refined, which in turn gives morality the strength to increase in purity. As our morality becomes purer, this will help in the development of concentration. When concentration is firmly established it helps in the arising of wisdom. Morality, concentration and wisdom help each other, they are interrelated like this.

In the end the path becomes one and functions at all times. We should look after the strength which arises from the path, because it is the strength which leads to insight and wisdom.

On the Dangers Of Samādhi

Samādhi is capable of bringing much harm or much benefit to the meditator. You can't say it brings only one or the other. For one who has no wisdom it is harmful, but for one who has wisdom it can bring real benefit, it can lead to insight.

That which can possibly be harmful to the meditator is absorption samādhi (*jhāna*), the samādhi with deep, sustained calm. This samādhi brings great peace. Where there is peace, there is happiness. When there is happiness, attachment and clinging to that happiness arise. The meditator doesn't want to contemplate anything else, he just wants to indulge in that pleasant feeling. When we have been practising for a long time we may become adept at entering this samādhi very quickly. As soon as we start to note our meditation object, the mind enters calm, and we don't want to come out to investigate anything. We just get stuck on that happiness. This is a danger to one who is practising meditation.

We must use *upacāra-samādhi*: Here, we enter calm and then, when the mind is sufficiently calm, we come out and look at outer activity.¹ Looking at the outside with a calm mind gives rise to wisdom. This is hard to understand, because it's almost like ordinary thinking and imagining. When thinking is there, we may think the mind isn't peaceful, but actually that thinking is taking place within the calm. There is contemplation but it doesn't disturb the calm. We may bring thinking up in order to contemplate it. Here we take up thinking to investigate it, it's not that we are aimlessly thinking or guessing away; it's something that arises from a peaceful mind. This is called 'awareness within calm and calm within awareness'. If it's simply ordinary thinking and imagining, the mind won't be peaceful, it will be disturbed. But I am not talking about ordinary thinking; this is a feeling that arises from the peaceful mind. It's called 'contemplation'. Wisdom is born right here.

So, there can be right samādhi and wrong samādhi. Wrong samādhi is where

the mind enters calm and there's no awareness at all. One could sit for two hours or even all day but the mind doesn't know where it's been or what's happened. It doesn't know anything. There is calm, but that's all. It's like a well-sharpened knife which we don't bother to put to any use. This is a deluded type of calm, because there is not much self-awareness. The meditator may think he has reached the ultimate already, so he doesn't bother to look for anything else. Samādhi can be an enemy at this level. Wisdom can not arise because there is no awareness of right and wrong.

With right samādhi, no matter what level of calm is reached, there is awareness. There is full mindfulness and clear comprehension. This is the samādhi which can give rise to wisdom, one can not get lost in it. Practitioners should understand this well. You can't do without this awareness, it must be present from beginning to end. This kind of samādhi has no danger.

You may wonder: where does the benefit arise, how does the wisdom arise, from samādhi? When right samādhi has been developed, wisdom has the chance to arise at all times. When the eye sees form, the ear hears sound, the nose smells odours, the tongue experiences taste, the body experiences touch or the mind experiences mental impressions - in all postures - the mind stays with full knowledge of the true nature of those sense impressions, it doesn't follow them.

When the mind has wisdom it doesn't 'pick and choose'. In any posture we are fully aware of the birth of happiness and unhappiness. We let go of both of these things, we don't cling. This is called right practice, which is present in all postures. These words 'all postures' do not refer only to bodily postures, they refer to the mind, which has mindfulness and clear comprehension of the truth at all times. When samādhi has been rightly developed, wisdom arises like this. This is called 'insight', knowledge of the truth.

There are two kinds of peace - the coarse and the refined. The peace which comes from samādhi is the coarse type. When the mind is peaceful there is happiness. The mind then takes this happiness to be peace. But happiness and unhappiness are becoming and birth. There is no escape from samsāra here because we still cling to them. So happiness is not peace, peace is not happiness.

The other type of peace is that which comes from wisdom. Here we don't confuse peace with happiness; we know the mind which contemplates and knows happiness and unhappiness as peace. The peace which arises from wisdom is not happiness, but is that which sees the truth of both happiness and unhappiness. Clinging to those states does not arise, the mind rises above them. This is the true goal of all Buddhist practice.

¹: 'Outer activity' refers to all manner of sense impressions. It is used in contrast to the 'inner inactivity' of absorption samādhi (*jhāna*), where the mind does not 'go out' to external sense impressions.

The Place of Coolness

The practice of Dhamma goes against our habits, the truth goes against our desires; so there is difficulty in the practice. Some things which we understand as wrong may be right, while the things we take to be right may be wrong. Why is this? Because our minds are in darkness, we don't clearly see the Truth. We don't really know anything and so are fooled by people's lies. They point out what is right as being wrong and we believe it; that which is wrong, they say is right, and we believe that. This is because we are not yet our own masters. Our moods lie to us constantly. We shouldn't take this mind and its opinions as our guide, because it doesn't know the truth.

Some people don't want to listen to others at all, but this is not the way of a man of wisdom. A wise man listens to everything. One who listens to Dhamma must listen just the same, whether he likes it or not, and not blindly believe or disbelieve. He must stay at the half-way mark, the middle point, and not be heedless. He just listens and then contemplates, giving rise to the right results accordingly.

A wise man should contemplate and see the cause and effect for himself before he believes what he hears. Even if the teacher speaks the truth, don't just believe it, because you don't yet know the truth of it for yourself.

It's the same for all of us, including myself. I've practised longer than you, I've seen many lies before. For instance, 'this practice is really difficult, really hard.' Why is the practice difficult? It's just because we think wrongly, we have wrong view.

Previously I lived together with other monks, but I didn't feel right. I ran away to the forests and mountains, fleeing the crowd, the monks and novices. I thought that they weren't like me, they didn't practise as hard as I did. They were sloppy. That person was like this, this person was like that. This was something that really put me in turmoil, it was the cause for my continually running away. But whether I lived alone or with others, I still had no peace. On my own I wasn't content, in a large group I wasn't content. I thought this discontent was due to my companions, due to my moods, due to my living place, the food, the weather, due to this and that. I was constantly searching for something to suit my mind.

As a *dhutanga* monk, I went travelling, but things still weren't right. So I contemplated, 'what can I do to make things right? What can I do?' Living with a lot of people I was dissatisfied, with few people I was dissatisfied. For what reason? I just couldn't see it. Why was I dissatisfied? Because I had wrong view, just that; because I still clung to the wrong Dhamma. Wherever I

went I was discontent, thinking, 'Here is no good, there is no good,' on and on like that. I blamed others. I blamed the weather, heat and cold, I blamed everything! Just like a mad dog. It bites whatever it meets, because it's mad. When the mind is like this our practice is never settled. Today we feel good, tomorrow no good. It's like that all the time. We don't attain contentment or peace.

The Buddha once saw a jackal, a wild dog, run out of the forest where he was staying. It stood still for a while, then it ran into the underbrush, and then out again. Then it ran into a tree hollow, then out again. Then it went into a cave, only to run out again. One minute it stood, the next it ran, then it lay down, then it jumped up. That jackal had mange. When it stood the mange would eat into its skin, so it would run. Running it was still uncomfortable, so it would stop. Standing was still uncomfortable, so it would lie down. Then it would jump up again, running into the underbrush, the tree hollow, never staying still.

The Buddha said, 'Monks, did you see that jackal this afternoon? Standing it suffered, running it suffered, sitting it suffered, lying down it suffered. In the underbrush, a tree hollow or a cave, it suffered. It blamed standing for its discomfort, it blamed sitting, it blamed running and lying down; it blamed the tree, the underbrush and the cave. In fact the problem was with none of those things. That jackal had mange. The problem was with the mange.'

We monks are just the same as that jackal. Our discontent is due to wrong view. Because we don't exercise sense restraint we blame our suffering on externals. Whether we live at Wat Pah Pong, in America or in London we aren't satisfied. Going to live at Bung Wai or any of the other branch monasteries we're still not satisfied. Why not? Because we still have wrong view within us. Wherever we go we aren't content.

But just like that dog, if the mange is cured, it is content wherever it goes, so it is for us. I reflect on this often, and I teach you this often, because it's very important. If we know the truth of our various moods we arrive at contentment. Whether it's hot or cold we are satisfied, living with many people or with few people we are satisfied. Contentment doesn't depend on how many people we are with, it comes only from right view. If we have right view then wherever we stay we are content.

But most of us have wrong view. It's just like a maggot - a maggot's living place is filthy, its food is filthy, but they suit the maggot. If you take a stick and brush it away from its lump of dung, it'll struggle to crawl back in. It's the same when the Ajahn teaches us to see rightly. We resist, it makes us feel uneasy. We run back to our 'lump of dung' because that's where we feel at home. We're all like this. If we don't see the harmful consequences of all our

wrong views then we can't leave them; the practice is difficult. So we should listen. There's nothing else to the practice.

If we have right view, wherever we go we are content. I have practised and seen this already. These days there are many monks, novices and laypeople coming to see me. If I still didn't know, if I still had wrong view, I'd be dead by now! The right abiding place for monks, the place of coolness, is just right view itself. We shouldn't look for anything else.

So even though you may be unhappy it doesn't matter, that unhappiness is uncertain. Is that unhappiness your 'self'? Is there any substance to it? Is it real? I don't see it as being real at all. Unhappiness is merely a flash of feeling which appears and then is gone. Happiness is the same. Is there a consistency to happiness? Is it truly an entity? It's simply a feeling that flashes suddenly and is gone. There! It's born and then it dies. Love just flashes up for a moment and then disappears. Where is the consistency in love, or hate, or resentment? In truth there is no substantial entity there, they are merely impressions which flare up in the mind and then die. They deceive us constantly, we find no certainty anywhere. Just as the Buddha said, when unhappiness arises it stays for a while, then disappears. When unhappiness disappears, happiness arises and lingers for a while and then dies. When happiness disappears, unhappiness arises again, on and on like this.

In the end we can say only this: apart from the birth, the life and the death of suffering, there is nothing. There is just this. But we who are ignorant run and grab it constantly. We never see the truth of it, that there's simply this continual change. If we understand this then we don't need to think very much, but we have much wisdom. If we don't know it, then we will have more thinking than wisdom - and maybe no wisdom at all! It's not until we truly see the harmful results of our actions that we can give them up. Likewise, it's not until we see the real benefits of practice that we can follow it, and begin working to make the mind 'good'.

If we cut a log of wood and throw it into the river, and that log doesn't sink or rot, or run aground on either of the banks of the river, that log will definitely reach the sea. Our practice is comparable to this. If you practise according to the path laid down by the Buddha, following it straight, you will transcend two things. What two things? Just those two extremes that the Buddha said were not the path of a true meditator: indulgence in pleasure and indulgence in pain. These are the two banks of the river. One of the banks of that river is hate, the other is love. Or you can say that one bank is happiness, the other unhappiness. The 'log' is this mind. As it 'flows down the river' it will experience happiness and unhappiness. If the mind doesn't cling to that happiness or unhappiness it will reach the 'ocean' of Nibbāna. You should see

that there is nothing other than happiness and unhappiness arising and disappearing. If you don't 'run aground' on these things then you are on the path of a true meditator.

This is the teaching of the Buddha. Happiness, unhappiness, love and hate are simply established in nature according to the constant law of nature. The wise person doesn't follow or encourage them, he doesn't cling to them. This is the mind which lets go of indulgence in pleasure and indulgence in pain. It is the right practice. Just as that log of wood will eventually flow to the sea, so will the mind which doesn't attach to these two extremes inevitably attain peace.

Monastery of Confusion

Staying or going is not important, but our thinking is. So all of you, please work together, cooperate and live in harmony. This should be the legacy you create here at Wat Pah Nanachat Bung Wai, the International Forest Monastery of Bung Wai District. Don't let it become Wat Pah Nanachat *Woon Wai*, the International Forest Monastery of Confusion and Trouble.¹ Whoever comes to stay here should be helping create this legacy.

The way I see it, the laypeople are providing robes material, almsfood, the dwelling place, and medicines in appropriate measure. It's true that they are simple country folk, but they support you out of their faith as best they can. Don't get carried away with your ideas of how you think they should be, such as, 'Oh, I try to teach these laypeople, but they do make me upset. Today is the observance day, and they came to take precepts. Then tomorrow they'll go casting their fishing nets. They'll drink their whisky. They do these things right out there where anyone can see. Then the next observance day, they'll come again. They'll take the precepts and listen to the Dhamma talk again, and then they'll go to put out their nets again, kill animals again, and drink again.'

You can get pretty upset thinking like this. You'll think that your activities with the laypeople don't bring any benefit at all. Today they take the precepts, and tomorrow they go cast fishing nets. A monk without much wisdom might get discouraged and feel he's failed, thinking his work bears no fruit. But it's not that his efforts have no result; it's those laypeople who get no result. Of course there is some good result from making efforts at virtue. So when there is such a situation and we start to suffer over it, what should we do?

We contemplate within ourselves to recognize that our good intentions have brought some benefit and do have meaning. It's just that the spiritual faculties of those people aren't developed. They aren't strong yet. That's how it is for now, so we patiently continue to advise them. If we just give up on such people, they are likely to become worse than they are now. If we keep at it, they may come to maturity one day and recognize their unskillful actions. Then they will feel some remorse and start to be ashamed of doing such things.

Right now, they have the faith to support us with material offerings, giving us our requisites for living. I've considered this; it's quite a big deal. It's no small thing. Donating our food, our dwellings, the medicines to treat our illnesses, is not a small thing. We are practising for the attainment of Nibbāna. If we don't have any food to eat, that will be pretty difficult. How would we sit in meditation? How would we be able to build this monastery?

We should recognize when people's spiritual faculties are not yet mature. So what should we do? We are like someone selling medicine. You've probably seen or heard them driving around with their loudspeakers touting the different medicines they have for different maladies. People who have bad headaches or poor digestion might come to buy.

We can accept money from those who buy our medicine; we don't take money from someone who doesn't buy anything. We can feel glad about the people who do buy something. If others stay in their houses and don't come out to buy, we shouldn't get angry with them for that. We shouldn't criticize them.

If we teach people but they can't practise properly, we shouldn't be getting angry with them. Don't do that! Don't criticize them, but rather keep on instructing them and leading them along. Whenever their faculties have ripened sufficiently, then they will want to do it. Just like when we are selling medicine, we just keep on doing our business. When people have ailments that trouble them, they will buy. Those who don't see a need to buy medicine probably aren't suffering from any such conditions. So never mind.

Keeping at it with this attitude, these problems will be done with. There were such situations in the Buddha's time too.

We want to do it right, but somehow we can't get there yet; our own faculties are not sufficiently mature. Our *pāramī* are not complete. It's like fruit that's still growing on the tree. You can't force it to be sweet - it's still unripe, it's small and sour, simply because it hasn't finished growing. You can't force it to be bigger, to be sweet, to be ripe - you have to let it ripen according to its nature. As time passes and things change, people may come to spiritual maturity. As time passes the fruit will grow, ripen and sweeten of its own accord. With such an attitude you can be at ease. But if you are impatient and dissatisfied, you keep asking, 'Why isn't this mango sweet yet? Why is it sour?' It's still sour because it's not ripe. That's the nature of fruit.

The people in the world are like that. It makes me think of the Buddha's teaching about four kinds of lotus. Some are still in the mud, some have grown out of the mud but are under the water, some are at the surface of the water, and some have risen above the water and blossomed. The Buddha was able to give his teachings to so many various beings because he understood their different levels of spiritual development. We should think about this and not feel oppressed by what happens here. Just consider yourselves to be like someone selling medicine. Your responsibility is to advertise it and make it available. If someone gets sick, they are likely to come and buy it. Likewise, if people's spiritual faculties mature sufficiently, one day they are likely to develop faith. It's not something we can force them to do. Seeing it in this

way, we will be okay.

Living here in this monastery is certainly meaningful. It's not without benefit. All of you, please practise together harmoniously and amicably. When you experience obstacles and suffering, recollect the virtues of the Buddha. What was the knowledge the Buddha realized? What did the Buddha teach? What does the Dhamma point out? How does the Sangha practise? Constantly recollecting the qualities of the Three Jewels brings a lot of benefit.

Whether you are Thais or people from other countries is not important. It's important to maintain harmony and work together. People come from all over to visit this monastery. When folks come to Wat Pah Pong, I urge them to come here, to see the monastery, to practise here. It's a legacy you are creating. It seems that the populace have faith and are gladdened by it. So don't forget yourselves. You should be leading people rather than being led by them. Make your best efforts to practise well and establish yourselves firmly, and good results will come.

Are there any doubts about practice you need to resolve now?

Questions and Answers

Question: When the mind isn't thinking much, but is in a sort of dark and dull state, is there something we should do to brighten it? Or should we just sit with it?

Answer: Is this all the time or when you are sitting in meditation? What exactly is this darkness like? Is it a lack of wisdom?

Q: When I sit to meditate, I don't get drowsy, but my mind feels dark, sort of dense or opaque.

A: So you would like to make your mind wise, right? Change your posture, and do a lot of walking meditation. That's one thing to do. You can walk for three hours at a time, until you're really tired.

Q: I do walking meditation a couple of hours a day, and I usually have a lot of thinking when I do it. But what really concerns me is this dark state when I sit. Should I just try to be aware of it and let go, or is there some means I should use to counter it?

A: I think maybe your postures aren't balanced. When you walk, you have a lot of thinking. So you should do a lot of discursive contemplation; then the mind can retreat from thinking. It won't stick there. But never mind. For now, increase the time you spend on walking meditation. Focus on that. Then if the mind is wandering, pull it out and do some contemplation, such as, for example, investigation of the body. Have you ever done that continuously

rather than as an occasional reflection? When you experience this dark state, do you suffer over it?

Q: I feel frustrated because of my state of mind. I'm not developing samādhi or wisdom.

A: When you have this condition of mind the suffering comes about because of not knowing. There is doubt as to why the mind is like this. The important principle in meditation is that whatever occurs, don't be in doubt over it. Doubt only adds to the suffering. If the mind is bright and awake, don't doubt that. It's a condition of mind. If it's dark and dull, don't doubt about that. Just continue to practise diligently without getting caught up in reactions to that state. Take note and be aware of your state of mind, don't have doubts about it. It is just what it is. When you entertain doubts and start grasping at it and giving it meaning, then it is dark.

As you practise, these states are things you encounter as you progress along. You needn't have doubts about them. Notice them with awareness and keep letting go. How about sleepiness? Is your sitting more sleepy or awake?

(No reply)

Maybe it's hard to recall if you've been sleepy! If this happens meditate with your eyes open. Don't close them. Instead, you can focus your gaze on one point, such as the light of a candle. Don't close your eyes! This is one way to remove the hindrance of drowsiness.

When you're sitting you can close your eyes from time to time and if the mind is clear, without drowsiness, you can then continue to sit with your eyes closed. If it's dull and sleepy, open your eyes and focus on the one point. It's similar to *kasina* meditation. Doing this, you can make the mind awake and tranquil. The sleepy mind isn't tranquil; it's obscured by hindrance and it's in darkness.

We should talk about sleep also. You can't simply go without sleep. That's the nature of the body. If you're meditating and you get unbearably, utterly sleepy, then let yourself sleep. This is one way to quell the hindrance when it's overwhelming you. Otherwise you practise along, keeping the eyes open if you have this tendency to get drowsy. Close your eyes after a while and check your state of mind. If it's clear, you can practise with eyes closed. Then after some time, take a rest. Some people are always fighting against sleep. They force themselves not to sleep, and the result is that when they sit they are always drifting off to sleep and falling over themselves, sitting in an unaware state.

Q: Can we focus on the tip of the nose?

A: That's fine. Whatever suits you, whatever you feel comfortable with and helps you fix your mind, focus on that.

It's like this: if we get attached to the ideals and take the guidelines that we are given in the instructions too literally, it can be difficult to understand. When doing a standard meditation such as mindfulness of breathing, first we should make the determination that right now we are going to do this practice, and we are going to make mindfulness of breathing our foundation. We only focus on the breath at three points, as it passes through the nostrils, the chest and the abdomen. When the air enters, it first passes the nose, then through the chest, then to the end point of the abdomen. As it leaves the body, the beginning is the abdomen, the middle is the chest, and the end is the nose. We merely note it. This is a way to start controlling the mind, tying awareness to these points at the beginning, middle and end of the inhalations and exhalations.

Before we begin we should first sit and let the mind relax. It's similar to sewing robes on a treadle sewing machine. When we are learning to use the sewing machine, first we just sit in front of the machine to get familiar with it and feel comfortable. Here, we just sit and breathe. Not fixing awareness on anything, we merely take note that we are breathing. We take note of whether the breath is relaxed or not and how long or short it is. Having noticed this, then we begin focusing on the inhalation and exhalation at the three points. We practise like this until we become skilled in it and it goes smoothly. The next stage is to focus awareness only on the sensation of the breath at the tip of the nose or the upper lip. At this point we aren't concerned with whether the breath is long or short, but only focus on the sensation of entering and exiting.

Different phenomena may contact the senses, or thoughts may arise. This is called initial thought (*vitakka*). The mind brings up some idea, be it about the nature of compounded phenomena (*sankhārā*), about the world, or whatever. Once the mind has brought it up, the mind will want to get involved and merge with it. If it's an object that is wholesome, let the mind take it up. If it is something unwholesome, stop it immediately. If it is something wholesome, let the mind contemplate it, and gladness, satisfaction and happiness will come about. The mind will be bright and clear as the breath goes in and out, and as the mind takes up these initial thoughts. Then initial thought becomes discursive thought (*vicāra*). The mind develops familiarity with the object, exerting itself and merging with it. At this point, there is no sleepiness.

After an appropriate period of this, take your attention back to the breath. As you continue on, there will be initial thought and discursive thought, initial

thought and discursive thought. If you are contemplating skilfully on an object such as the nature of *sankhāra*, the mind will experience deeper tranquillity and rapture is born. There is the *vitakka* and *vicāra*, and that leads to happiness of mind. At this time there won't be any dullness or drowsiness. The mind won't be dark if we practise like this. It will be gladdened and enraptured.

This rapture will start to diminish and disappear after a while, so you can take up initial thought again. The mind will become firm and certain with it - undistracted. Then you go on to discursive thought again, the mind becoming one with it. When you are practising a meditation that suits your temperament and doing it well, then whenever you take up the object, rapture will come about: the hairs of the body stand on end and the mind is enraptured and satiated.

When it's like this there can't be any dullness or drowsiness. You won't have any doubts. Back and forth between initial and discursive thought, initial and discursive thought, over and over again and rapture comes. Then there is *sukha*.

This takes place in sitting practice. After sitting for a while, you can get up and do walking meditation. The mind can be the same in the walking. Not sleepy, it has *vitakka* and *vicāra*, *vitakka* and *vicāra*, then rapture. There won't be any of the *nīvarana*, and the mind will be unstained. Whatever takes place, never mind; you don't need to doubt about any experiences you may have, be they of light, of bliss, or whatever. Don't entertain doubts about these conditions of mind. If the mind is dark, if the mind is illumined, don't fixate on these conditions, don't be attached to them. Let go, discard them. Keep walking, keep noting what is taking place without getting bound or infatuated. Don't suffer over these conditions of mind. Don't have doubts about them. They are just what they are, following the way of mental phenomena. Sometimes the mind will be joyful. Sometimes it will be sorrowful. There can be happiness or suffering; there can be obstruction. Rather than doubting, understand that conditions of mind are like this; whatever manifests is coming about due to causes ripening. At this moment this condition is manifesting; that's what you should recognize. Even if the mind is dark you don't need to be upset over that. If it becomes bright, don't be excessively gladdened by that. Don't have doubts about these conditions of mind, or about your reactions to them.

Do your walking meditation until you are really tired, then sit. When you sit determine your mind to sit; don't just play around. If you get sleepy, open your eyes and focus on some object. Walk until the mind separates itself from thoughts and is still, then sit. If you are clear and awake, you can close your

eyes. If you get sleepy again, open your eyes and look at an object.

Don't try to do this all day and all night. When you're in need of sleep, let yourself sleep. Just as with our food: once a day we eat. The time comes and we give food to the body. The need for sleep is the same. When the time comes, give yourself some rest. When you've had an appropriate rest, get up. Don't let the mind languish in dullness, but get up and get to work - start practising. Do a lot of walking meditation. If you walk slowly and the mind becomes dull, then walk fast. Learn to find the right pace for yourself.

Q: Are *vitakka* and *vicāra* the same?

A: You're sitting and suddenly the thought of someone pops into your head - that's *vitakka*, the initial thought. Then you take that idea of the person and start thinking about them in detail. *Vitakka* picks up the idea, *vicāra* investigates it. For example, we pick up the idea of death and then we start considering it: 'I will die, others will die, every living being will die; when they die where will they go?' Then stop! Stop and bring it back again. When it gets running like that, stop it again; and then go back to mindfulness of the breath. Sometimes the discursive thought will wander off and not come back, so you have to stop it. Keep at it until the mind is bright and clear.

If you practise *vicāra* with an object that you are suited to, you may experience the hairs of your body standing on end, tears pouring from your eyes, a state of extreme delight, many different things occur as rapture comes.

Q: Can this happen with any kind of thinking, or is it only in a state of tranquillity that it happens?

A: It's when the mind is tranquil. It's not ordinary mental proliferation. You sit with a calm mind and then the initial thought comes. For example, I think of my brother who just passed away. Or I might think of some other relatives. This is when the mind is tranquil - the tranquillity isn't something certain, but for the moment the mind is tranquil. After this initial thought comes, I go into discursive thought.

If it's a line of thinking that's skilful and wholesome, it leads to ease of mind and happiness, and there is rapture with its attendant experiences. This rapture came from the initial and discursive thinking that took place in a state of calmness. We don't have to give it names such as first *jhāna*, second *jhāna* and so forth. We just call it tranquillity.

The next factor is bliss (*sukha*). Eventually we drop the initial and discursive thinking as tranquillity deepens. Why? The state of mind is becoming more refined and subtle. *Vitakka* and *vicāra* are relatively coarse, and they will vanish. There will remain just the rapture accompanied by bliss and one-

pointedness of mind. When it reaches full measure there won't be anything, the mind is empty. That's absorption concentration.

We don't need to fixate or dwell on any of these experiences. They will naturally progress from one to the next. At first there is initial and discursive thought, rapture, bliss and one-pointedness. Then initial and discursive thinking are thrown off, leaving rapture, bliss, and one-pointedness. Rapture is thrown off,² then bliss, and finally only one-pointedness and equanimity remain. It means the mind becomes more and more tranquil, and its objects are steadily decreasing until there is nothing but one-pointedness and equanimity.

When the mind is tranquil and focused this can happen. It is the power of mind, the state of the mind that has attained tranquillity. When it's like this there won't be any sleepiness. It can't enter the mind; it will disappear. The other hindrances of sensual desire, aversion, doubt and restlessness and agitation won't be present. Though they may still exist latent in the mind of the meditator, they won't occur at this time.

Q: Should we be closing our eyes so as to shut out the external environment or should we just deal with things as we see them? Is it important whether we open or close the eyes?

A: When we are new to training, it's important to avoid too much sensory input, so it's better to close the eyes. Not seeing objects that can distract and affect us, we build up the mind's strength. When the mind is strong then we can open the eyes and whatever we see won't sway us. Open or closed won't matter.

When you rest you normally close your eyes. Sitting in meditation with eyes closed is the dwelling place for a practitioner. We find enjoyment and rest in it. This is an important basis for us. But when we are not sitting in meditation, will we be able to deal with things? We sit with eyes closed and we profit from that. When we open our eyes and leave the formal meditation, we can handle whatever we meet. Things won't get out of hand. We won't be at a loss. Basically we are just handling things. It's when we go back to our sitting that we really develop greater wisdom.

This is how we develop the practice. When it reaches fulfilment, it doesn't matter whether we open or close our eyes, it will be the same. The mind won't change or deviate. At all times of the day - morning, noon or night - the state of mind will be the same. We dwell thus. There is nothing that can shake the mind. When happiness arises, we recognize, 'It's not certain,' and it passes. Unhappiness arises and we recognize, 'It's not certain,' and that's that. You get the idea that you want to disrobe. This is not certain. But you think

it's certain. Before you wanted to be ordained, and you were so sure about that. Now you are sure you want to disrobe. It's all uncertain, but you don't see it because of your darkness of mind. Your mind is telling you lies, 'Being here, I'm only wasting time.' If you disrobe and go back to the world, won't you waste time there? You don't think about that. Disrobing to work in the fields and gardens, to grow beans or raise pigs and goats, won't that be a waste of time?

There was once a large pond full of fish. As time passed, the rainfall decreased and the pond became shallow. One day a bird showed up at the edge of the pond. He told the fish, 'I really feel sorry for you fish. Here you barely have enough water to keep your backs wet. Do you know that not very far from here there's a big lake, several meters deep where the fish swim happily?'

When the fish in that shallow pond heard this, they got excited. They said to the bird, 'It sounds good. But how could we get there?'

The bird said, 'No problem. I can carry you in my bill, one at a time.'

The fish discussed it among themselves. 'It's not so great here anymore. The water doesn't even cover our heads. We ought to go.' So they lined up to be taken by the bird.

The bird took one fish at a time. As soon as he flew out of sight of the pond, he landed and ate the fish. Then he would return to the pond and tell them, 'Your friend is right this moment swimming happily in the lake, and he asks when you will be joining him!'

It sounded fantastic to the fish. They couldn't wait to go, so they started pushing to get to the head of the line. The bird finished off the fish like that. Then he went back to the pond to see if he could find anymore. There was only one crab there. So the bird started his sales pitch about the lake.

The crab was sceptical. He asked the bird how he could get there. The bird told him he would carry him in his bill. But this crab had some wisdom. He told the bird, 'Let's do it like this - I'll sit on your back with my arms around your neck. If you try any tricks, I'll choke you with my claws.' The bird felt frustrated by this, but he gave it a try thinking he might still somehow get to eat the crab. So the crab got on his back and they took off.

The bird flew around looking for a good place to land. But as soon as he tried to descend, the crab started squeezing his throat with his claws. The bird couldn't even cry out. He just made a dry, croaking sound. So in the end he had to give up and return the crab to the pond.

I hope you can have the wisdom of the crab! If you are like those fish, you

will listen to the voices that tell you how wonderful everything will be if you go back to the world. That's an obstacle ordained people meet with. Please be careful about this.

Q: Why is it that unpleasant states of mind are difficult to see clearly, while pleasant states are easy to see? When I experience happiness or pleasure I can see that it's something impermanent, but when I'm unhappy that's harder to see.

A: You are thinking in terms of your attraction and aversion and trying to figure it out, but actually delusion is the predominant root. You feel that unhappiness is hard to see while happiness is easy to see. That's just the way your afflictions work. Aversion is hard to let go of, right? It's a strong feeling. You say happiness is easy to let go of. It's not really easy; it's just that it's not so overpowering. Pleasure and happiness are things people like and feel comfortable with. They're not so easy to let go of. Aversion is painful, but people don't know how to let go of it. The truth is that they are equal. When you contemplate thoroughly and get to a certain point you will quickly recognize that they're equal. If you had a scale to weigh them their weight would be the same. But we incline towards the pleasurable.

Are you saying that you can let go of happiness easily, while unhappiness is difficult to let go of? You think that the things we like are easy to give up, but you're wondering why the things we dislike are hard to give up. But if they're not good, why are they hard to give up? It's not like that. Think anew. They are completely equal. It's just that we don't incline to them equally. When there is unhappiness we feel bothered, we want it to go away quickly and so we feel it's hard to get rid of. Happiness doesn't usually bother us, so we are friends with it and feel we can let go of it easily. It's not like that; it's not oppressing and squeezing our hearts, that's all. Unhappiness oppresses us. We think one has more value or weight than the other, but in truth they are equal. It's like heat and cold. We can be burned to death by fire. We can also be frozen stiff by cold and we die just the same. Neither is greater than the other. Happiness and suffering are like this, but in our thinking we give them different values.

Or consider praise and criticism. Do you feel that praise is easy to let go of and criticism is hard to let go of? They are really equal. But when we are praised we don't feel disturbed; we are pleased, but it's not a sharp feeling. Criticism is painful, so we feel it's hard to let go of. Being pleased is also hard to let go of, but we are partial to it so we don't have the same desire to get rid of it quickly. The delight we take in being praised and the sting we feel when criticized are equal. They are the same. But when our minds meet these things we have unequal reactions to them. We don't mind being close to some of

them.

Please understand this. In our meditation we will meet with the arising of all sorts of mental afflictions. The correct outlook is to be ready to let go of all of it, whether pleasant or painful. Even though happiness is something we desire and suffering is something we don't desire, we recognize they are of equal value. These are things that we will experience.

Happiness is wished for by people in the world. Suffering is not wished for. Nibbāna is something beyond wishing or not wishing. Do you understand? There is no wishing involved in Nibbāna. Wanting to get happiness, wanting to be free of suffering, wanting to transcend happiness and suffering - there are none of these things. It is peace.

As I see it, realizing the truth doesn't happen by relying on others. You should understand that all doubts will be resolved by our own efforts, by continuous, energetic practice. We won't get free of doubt by asking others. We will only end doubt through our own unrelenting efforts.

Remember this! It's an important principle in practice. The actual doing is what will instruct you. You will come to know all right and wrong. 'The Brahmin shall reach the exhaustion of doubt through unceasing practice.' It doesn't matter wherever we go - everything can be resolved through our own ceaseless efforts. But we can't stick with it. We can't bear the difficulties we meet; we find it hard to face up to our suffering and not to run away from it. If we do face it and bear with it, then we gain knowledge, and the practice starts instructing us automatically, teaching us about right and wrong and the way things really are. Our practice will show us the faults and ill results of wrong thinking. It really happens like this. But it's hard to find people who can see it through. Everyone wants instant awakening. Rushing here and there following your impulses, you only end up worse off for it. Be careful about this.

I've often taught that tranquillity is stillness; flowing is wisdom. We practise meditation to calm the mind and make it still; then it can flow. In the beginning we learn what still water is like and what flowing water is like. After practising for a while we will see how these two support each other. We have to make the mind calm, like still water. Then it flows. Both being still and flowing: this is not easy to contemplate.

We can understand that still water doesn't flow. We can understand that flowing water isn't still. But when we practise we take hold of both of these. The mind of a true practitioner is like still water that flows, or flowing water that's still. Whatever takes place in the mind of a Dhamma practitioner is like flowing water that is still. To say that it is only flowing is not correct. To say

only still is not correct. Ordinarily, still water is still and flowing water flows. But when we have experience of practice, our minds will be in this condition of flowing water that is still.

This is something we've never seen. When we see flowing water it is just flowing along. When we see still water, it doesn't flow. But within our minds, it will really be like this; like flowing water that is still. In our Dhamma practice we have samādhi, or tranquillity, and wisdom mixed together. We have morality, meditation and wisdom. Then wherever we sit the mind is still and it flows. Still, flowing water. With meditative stability and wisdom, tranquillity and insight, it's like this. The Dhamma is like this. If you have reached the Dhamma, then at all times you will have this experience. Being tranquil and having wisdom: flowing, yet still. Still, yet flowing.

Whenever this occurs in the mind of one who practises, it is something different and strange; it is different from the ordinary mind that one has known all along. Before, when it was flowing, it flowed. When it was still, it didn't flow, but was only still - the mind can be compared to water in this way. Now it has entered a condition that is like flowing water being still. Whether standing, walking, sitting, or lying down, it is like water that flows yet is still. If we make our minds like this, there is both tranquillity and wisdom.

What is the purpose of tranquillity? Why should we have wisdom? They are only for the purpose of freeing ourselves from suffering, nothing else. At present we are suffering, living with *dukkha*, not understanding *dukkha*, and therefore holding onto it. But if the mind is as I've been speaking about, there will be many kinds of knowledge. One will know suffering, know the cause of suffering, know the cessation of suffering and know the way of practice to reach the end of suffering. These are the Noble Truths. They will appear of themselves when there is still, flowing water.

When it is like this, then no matter what we are doing we will have no heedlessness; the habit of heedlessness will weaken and disappear. Whatever we experience we won't fall into heedlessness because the mind will naturally hold fast to the practice. It will be afraid of losing the practice. As we keep on practising and learning from experience we will be drinking of the Dhamma more and more, and our faith will keep increasing.

For one who practises it has to be like this. We shouldn't be the kind of people who merely follow others: If our friends aren't doing the practice we won't do it either because we would feel embarrassed. If they stop, we stop. If they do it, we do it. If the teacher tells us to do something, we do it. If he stops, we stop. This is not a very quick way to realization.

What's the point of our training here? It's so that when we are alone, we will be able to continue with the practice. So now, while living together here, when there are morning and evening gatherings to practise, we join in and practise with the others. We build up the habit so that the way of practice is internalized in our hearts, and then we will be able to live anywhere and still practise in the same way.

It's like having a certificate of guarantee. If the King is coming here, we prepare everything as perfectly as we can. He stays a short while and then goes on his way, but he gives his royal seal to acknowledge that things are in order here. Now many of us are practising together, and it's time to learn the practice well, to understand it and internalize it so that each of you can be a witness to yourself. It's like children coming of age.

¹: One of Ajahn Chah's favourite plays on words.

²: The scriptures usually say, 'with the fading of rapture.'

Knowing the World

All things just as they are display the truth. But we have biases and preferences about how we want them to be. *Lokavidū* means knowing the world clearly. The world is these phenomena (*sabhāva*) abiding as they are. To sum it up simply, the world is *arom*.¹ That's an easy way to put it. The world is *arom*. If we say 'world', that's pretty vast. 'Arom are the world' is a lot simpler. The world is *arom*. Being deluded by the world is being deluded by *arom*; being deluded by *arom* is being deluded by the world. *Lokavidū*, knowing the world clearly: however the world is, that's what we should know. It exists according to its conditions. So we should have full, present awareness of it.

Similarly, we should know *sankhāra* for what they are; develop wisdom that knows *sankhārā*. Whatever the truth of *sankhārā* is, however they really are, that's the truth we should know. That's called wisdom that accepts and knows without obstacles.

We need to develop a mind that has tranquillity together with wisdom in control of things. We talk about *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*, and about *samatha* meditation and *vipassanā* meditation. But they are really all the same matter. They are the same, but we divide them into different categories and get confused. I've often made a simple analogy about it - there are things to compare it to - which can make it easier to contemplate and understand.

A little mango later becomes a large, ripe mango. Is the little mango the same piece of fruit as the large one? From the time it's just a bud flowering on the tree, it's the same one mango. As it grows into a small mango and then gets bigger and bigger, almost ripe, then finally ripe, it's only undergoing change.

The aspects of practice we talk about are the same. *Sīla* simply means giving up wrongdoing. A person without *sīla* is in a hot condition. Giving up wrongdoing and evil ways, brings coolness, preventing harm or ill effects. The blessing that comes from this freedom from harmful effects is a tranquil mind - that is *samādhi*. When the mind is in *samādhi*, clean and pure, it will see many things. It's like water that is still and undisturbed. You can see your face in it. You can see things further away reflected as well. You can see the roof of the building over there. If a bird alights on the roof you can see it.

These factors are really all one, just like the one mango. The tiny fruit is that same one mango. The growing fruit is the same mango. The ripe fruit is the same mango. From green to yellow, it's the same mango; it's undergoing change, and that's why we see difference.

Having this kind of simple understanding can put us at ease. Doubts will

diminish. If instead we are relying on texts and seeking detailed explanations, we are likely to end up in confusion. So we have to watch our own minds. 'Bhikkhus! You should be watching over your minds. Those who watch over their minds shall escape the snares of Māra.' Both Māra and his snares. And it depends on our own investigation.

My way of practice was a little strange. After I ordained and started to practise, I had a lot of doubts and questions. But I didn't like to ask anyone about them very much. Even when I met Ajahn Mun, I didn't ask him many questions. I wanted to ask, but I didn't. I sat and listened to his teaching. I had questions, but I didn't ask. Asking someone else is like borrowing someone else's knife to cut something. We never come to have our own knife. That's the way I felt. So I didn't ask many questions of others. If I stayed with a teacher for a year or two, I'd listen to his discourses and try to work things out for myself. I would seek my own answers. I was different from other disciples, but I was able to develop wisdom; this way made me resourceful and clever. I didn't become heedless, rather I contemplated things until I could see for myself, increasing my understanding and removing my doubts.

My advice is to not let yourself get wrapped up in doubts and questions. Let them go and directly contemplate whatever you are experiencing. Don't make a big deal out of any physical pleasure or pain you experience. When you sit in meditation and start to feel tired or uncomfortable, adjust your position. Endure as much as you can, and then move. Don't overdo it. Develop a lot of mindfulness - that's the point. Do your walking and sitting meditation as much as you can; the aim is to be developing mindfulness as much as you can, knowing things fully. That's enough.

Please take my words to contemplate. Whatever form of practice you're doing, when objects of mind arise, whether internally or externally, those are called *arom*. The one who is aware of the *arom* is called ... well, whatever you want to call it is OK; you can call it 'mind'. The *arom* is one thing, and the one who knows the *arom* is another. It's like the eye and the objects it sees. The eye isn't the objects, and the objects aren't the eye. The ear hears sounds, but the ear isn't the sound and the sound isn't the ear. When there is contact between the two, then things happen.

All states of mind, happy or unhappy, are called *arom*. Whatever they may be, never mind - we should constantly be reminding ourselves that 'this is uncertain'.

People don't consider very much, that 'this is uncertain'. Just this is the vital factor that will bring about wisdom. It's really important. In order to cease our coming and going and come to rest, we only need to say, 'this is uncertain.' Sometimes we may be distraught over something to the point that tears are

flowing; this is something not certain. When moods of desire or aversion come to us, we should just remind ourselves of this one thing. Whether standing, walking, sitting, or lying down, whatever appears is uncertain. Can't you do this? Keep it up no matter what happens. Give it a try. You don't need a lot - just this will work. This is something that brings wisdom.

The way I practise meditation is not very complicated - just this. This is what it all comes down to: 'it's uncertain.' Everything meets at this point. Don't keep track of the various instances of mental experience. When you sit, there may be various conditions of mind appearing, seeing and knowing all manner of things, experiencing different states. Don't be keeping track of them² and don't get wrapped up in them. You only need to remind yourself that they're uncertain. That's enough. That's easy to do. It's simple. Then you can stop. Knowledge will come, but then don't make too much out of that or get attached to it.

Real investigation, investigation in the correct way, doesn't involve thinking. As soon as something contacts the eye, ear, nose, tongue, or body, it immediately takes place of its own. You don't have to pick up anything to look at - things just present themselves and investigation happens of its own. We talk about *vitakka*, 'initial thought'. It means raising something up. *Vicāra* is 'discursive thought'. It's investigation, seeing the planes of existence (*bhūmi*) that appear.

In the final analysis, the way of the Buddha flourishes through impermanence. It is always timely and relevant, whether in the time of the Buddha, in other times past, in the present age, or in the future. At all times, it is impermanence that rules. This is something you should meditate on.

The true and correct words of the sages will not lack mention of impermanence. This is the truth. If there is no mention of impermanence, it is not the speech of the wise. It is not the speech of the Buddha or the ariyas; it's called speech that does not accept the truth of existence.

All things have need of a way of release. Contemplation is not a matter of holding on and sticking to things. It's a matter of releasing. A mind that can't release phenomena is in a state of intoxication. In practice, it's important not to be intoxicated. When practice really seems to be good, don't be intoxicated by that good. If you're intoxicated by it, it becomes something harmful, and your practice is no longer correct. We do our best, but it's important not to become drunk on our efforts, otherwise we are out of harmony with Dhamma. This is the Buddha's advice. Even the good is not something to get intoxicated by. Be aware of this when it happens.

A dam needs a sluiceway so that the water can run off. It's the same for us in

practice. Using willpower to push ourselves and control the mind is something we can do at times, but don't get drunk on it. We want to be teaching the mind, not merely controlling it, so that it becomes aware. Too much forcing will make you crazy. What's vital is to keep on increasing awareness and sensitivity. Our path is like this. There are many points for comparison. We could talk about construction work and bring it back to the way of training the mind.

There is a lot of benefit to be had from practising meditation, from watching over your mind. This is the first and foremost thing. The teachings you can study in the scriptures and commentaries are true and valuable, but they are secondary. They are people's explanations of the truth. But there is actual truth that surpasses the words. Sometimes the expositions that are derived seem uneven or are not so accessible, and with the passing of time they can become confusing. But the actual truth they are based on remains the same and isn't affected by what anyone says or does. It is the original, natural state of things that does not change or deteriorate. The explanations people compose are secondary or tertiary, one or two steps removed, and though they can be good and beneficial and flourish for some time, they are subject to deterioration.³

It's like the way that as population keeps increasing, troubles increase along with it. That's quite natural. The more people there are, the more issues there will be to deal with. Then leaders and teachers will try to show us the right way to live, to do good and solve problems. That can be valid and necessary, but it's still not the same as the reality those good ideas are based on. The true Dhamma that is the essence of all good has no way to decline or deteriorate, because it is immutable. It is the source, the *saccadhamma*, existing as it is. All the followers of the Buddha's way who practise the Dhamma must strive to realize this. Then they may find different means to illustrate it. Over time, the explanations lose their potency, but the source remains the same.

So the Buddha taught to focus your attention and investigate. Practitioners in search of the truth, do not be attached to your views and knowledge. Don't be attached to the knowledge of others. Don't be attached to anyone's knowledge. Rather, develop special knowledge; allow the *saccadhamma* to be revealed in full measure.

In training the mind, investigating the *saccadhamma*, our own minds are where it can be seen. When there is doubt about anything, we should pay attention to our thoughts and feelings, our mental processes. This is what we should know. The rest is all superficial.

In practising Dhamma, we will meet with many sorts of experiences, such as

fear. What will we rely on then? When the mind is wrapped up in fear, it can't find anything to rely on. This is something I've gone through; the deluded mind stuck in fear, unable to find a safe place anywhere. So where can this be settled? It gets settled right at that place where it appears. Wherever it arises, that is where it ceases. Wherever the mind has fear, it can end fear right there. Putting it simply: when the mind is completely full of fear, it has nowhere else to go, and it can stop right there. The place of no fear is there in the place of fear. Whatever states the mind undergoes, if it experiences *nimitta*, visions, or knowledge in meditation, for example, it doesn't matter - we are taught to focus awareness on this mind in the present. That is the standard. Don't chase after external phenomena. All the things we contemplate come to conclusion at the source, the place where they arise. This is where the causes are. This is important.

Feeling fear is a good example, since it's easy to see; if we let ourselves experience it until it has nowhere to go, then we will have no more fear, because it will be exhausted. It loses its power, so we don't feel fear anymore. Not feeling fear means it has become empty. We accept whatever comes our way, and it loses its power over us.

This is what the Buddha wanted us to place our trust in; he wanted us not to be attached to our own views, not to be attached to others' views. This is really important. We are aiming at the knowledge that comes from realization of the truth, so we don't want to get stuck in attachment to our own or others' views and opinions. But when we have our ideas or interact with others, watching them contact the mind can be illuminating. Knowledge can be born in those things that we have and experience.

In watching the mind and cultivating meditation, there can be many points of wrong understanding or deviation. Some people focus on conditions of mind and want to analyse them excessively, so their minds are always active. Or maybe we examine the five *khandhā*, or we go into further detail with the thirty-two parts of the body; there are many such classifications that are taught for contemplation. So we ponder and we analyse. Looking at the five *khandhā* doesn't seem to get us to any conclusion, so we might go into the thirty-two parts, always analysing and investigating. But the way I see it, our attitude towards these five *khandhā*, these heaps that we see right here, should be one of weariness and disenchantment, because they don't follow our wishes. I think that's probably enough. If they survive, we shouldn't be overly joyful to the point of forgetting ourselves. If they break up, we shouldn't be overly dejected by that. Recognizing this much should be enough. We don't have to tear apart the skin, the flesh, and the bones.

This is something I've often talked about. Some people have to analyse like

that, even if they are looking at a tree. Students in particular want to know what merit and demerit are, what form they have, what they look like. I explain to them that these things have no form. Merit is in our having correct understanding, correct attitude. But they want to know everything so clearly in such great detail.

So I've used the example of a tree. The students will look at a tree, and they want to know all about the parts of the tree. Well, a tree has roots, it has leaves. It lives because of the roots. The students have to know, how many roots does it have? Major roots, minor roots, branches, leaves, they want to know all the details and numbers. Then they will feel they have clear knowledge about the tree. But the Buddha said that a person who wants such knowledge is actually pretty stupid. These things aren't necessary to know. Just knowing that there are roots and leaves is sufficient. Do you want to count all the leaves on a tree? If you look at one leaf, you should be able to get the picture.

It's the same with people. If we know ourselves, then we understand all people in the universe without having to go and observe them. The Buddha wanted us to look at ourselves. As we are, so are others. We are all *sāmaññalakkhana*, all being of the same characteristics. All *sankhārā* are like this.

So we practise samādhi to be able to give up the defilements, to give birth to knowledge and vision and let go of the five *khandhā*. Sometimes people talk about samatha. Sometimes they talk about vipassanā. I feel this can become confusing. Those who practise samādhi will praise samādhi. But, it is just for making the mind tranquil so it can know those things we have been talking about.

Then there are those who will say, 'I don't need to practise samādhi so much. This plate will break one day in the future. Isn't that good enough? That will work, won't it? I'm not very skilled in samādhi, but I already know that the plate must break someday. Yes, I take good care of it, because I'm afraid it will break, but I know that such is its future, and when it does break, I won't be suffering over that. Isn't my view correct? I don't need to practise a lot of samādhi, because I already have this understanding. You practise samādhi only for developing this understanding. After training your mind through sitting, you came to this view. I don't sit much, but I am already confident that this is the way of phenomena.'

This is a question for us practitioners. There are many factions of teachers promoting their different methods of meditation. It can get confusing. But the real point of it all is to be able to recognize the truth, seeing things as they really are and being free of doubt.

As I see it, once we have correct knowledge, the mind comes under our command. What is this command about? The command is in *anicca*, knowing that everything is impermanent. Everything stops here when we see clearly, and it becomes the cause for us to let go. Then we let things be, according to their nature. If nothing is occurring, we abide in equanimity, and if something comes up, we contemplate: does it cause us to have suffering? Do we hold onto it with grasping attachment? Is there anything there? This is what supports and sustains our practice. If we practise and get to this point, I think every one of us will realize genuine peace.

Whether we are undertaking vipassanā meditation or samatha meditation, just this is what it's really about. But these days, it seems to me that when Buddhists talk about these things according to the traditional explanations, it becomes vague and mixed up. But the truth (*saccadhamma*) isn't vague or mixed up. It remains as it is.

So I feel it's better to seek out the source, looking at the way things originate in the mind. There's not a lot to this.

Birth, ageing, illness, and death: it's brief, but it's a universal truth. So see it clearly and acknowledge these facts. If you acknowledge them, you will be able to let go. Gain, rank, praise, happiness, and their opposites - you can let them go, because you recognize them for what they are.

If we reach this place of 'recognizing truth', we will be uncomplicated, undemanding people, content with simple food, dwelling, and other requisites for life, easy to speak to and unassuming in our actions. Without difficulty or trouble, we will live at ease. One who meditates and realizes a tranquil mind will be like this.

At present we are trying to practise in the way of the Buddha and his disciples. Those beings had achieved awakening, yet they still maintained their practice as long as they were living. They acted for the benefit of themselves and for the benefit of others, yet even after they had accomplished all that they could, they still kept up their practice, seeking their own and others' well-being in various ways. I think we should take them as the model for our practice. It means not becoming complacent - that was their deeply ingrained nature. They never slackened their efforts. Effort was their way, their natural habit. Such is the character of the sages, of genuine practitioners.

We can compare it to rich people and poor people. The rich are especially hard-working, much more so than the poor. And the less effort poor people make, the less chance they have of becoming rich. The rich have knowledge and experience of a lot of things, so they maintain the habit of diligence in all they do.

If we want to take a break or get some rest, we will find rest in the practice itself. Once we've practised to get to the goal, know the goal, and be the goal, then when we are active, there's no way to incur loss or be harmed. When we are sitting still, there is no way we can be harmed. In all situations, nothing can affect us. Practice has matured to fulfilment and we have reached the destination. Maybe today we don't have a chance to sit and practise samādhi, but we are OK. Samādhi doesn't mean only sitting. There can be samādhi in all postures. If we are really practising in all postures, we will enjoy samādhi thus. There won't be anything that can interfere. Such words as 'I'm not in a clear state of mind now, so I can't practise' will not be heard. We won't have such ideas; we will never feel that way. Our practice is well developed and complete - this is how it should be. When we are free of doubt and perplexity, we stop at this point and contemplate.

You can look into this: self-view, sceptical doubt, superstitious attachment to rites and rituals. The first step is to get free of these. The mind needs to get free of whatever sort of knowledge you gain. What are they like now? To what extent do we still have them? We are the only ones who can know this; we have to know for ourselves. Who else can know better than we? If we are stuck in attachment to self-view, doubt, superstition here, have doubt here, are still groping here, then there is the conception of self here. But now we can only think, if there is no self, then who is it that takes interest and practises?

All these things go together. If we come to know them through practice and make an end of them, we live in an ordinary way. Just like the Buddha and the ariyas. They lived just like worldly beings (*puthujjana*). They used the same language as worldly beings. Their everyday existence wasn't really different. They used many of the same conventions. Where they differed was that they didn't create suffering for themselves with their minds. They had no suffering. This is the crucial point; they went beyond suffering, extinguishing suffering. Nibbāna means 'extinguishing'. Extinguishing suffering, extinguishing heat and torment, extinguishing doubt and anxiety.

There's no need to be in doubt about the practice. Whenever there is doubt about something, don't have doubt about the doubt - look directly at it and crush it like that.

In the beginning, we train to pacify the mind. This can be difficult to do. You have to find a meditation that suits your own temperament. That will make it easier to gain tranquillity. But in truth, the Buddha wanted us to return to ourselves, to take responsibility and look at ourselves.

Anger is hot. Pleasure, the extreme of indulgence is too cool. The extreme of self-torment is hot. We want neither hot nor cold. Know hot and cold. Know all things that appear. Do they cause us to suffer? Do we form attachment to

them? The teaching that birth is suffering doesn't only mean dying from this life and taking rebirth in the next life. That's so far away. The suffering of birth happens right now. It's said that becoming is the cause of birth. What is this 'becoming'? Anything that we attach to and put meaning on is becoming. Whenever we see anything as self or other or belonging to ourselves, without wise discernment to know it as only a convention, that is all becoming. Whenever we hold on to something as 'us' or 'ours', and it then undergoes change, the mind is shaken by that. It is shaken with a positive or negative reaction. That sense of self experiencing happiness or unhappiness is birth. When there is birth, it brings suffering along with it. Ageing is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering.

Right now, do we have becoming? Are we aware of this becoming? For example, take the trees in the monastery. The abbot of the monastery can take birth as a worm in every tree in the monastery if he isn't aware of himself, if he feels that it is really 'his' monastery. This grasping at 'my' monastery with 'my' orchard and 'my' trees is the worm that latches on there. If there are thousands of trees, he will become a worm thousands of times. This is becoming. When the trees are cut or meet with any harm, the worms are affected; the mind is shaken and takes birth with all this anxiety. Then there is the suffering of birth, the suffering of ageing, and so forth. Are you aware of the way this happens?

Well, those objects in our homes or our orchards are still a little far away. Let's look right at ourselves sitting here. We are composed of the five aggregates and the four elements. These *sankhārā* are designated as a self. Do you see these *sankhārā* and these suppositions as they really are? If you don't see the truth of them, there is becoming, being gladdened or depressed over the five *khandhā*, and we take birth, with all the resultant sufferings. This rebirth happens right now, in the present. This glass isn't broken now, and we are happy about it now. But if this glass breaks right now, we are upset right now. This is how it happens, being upset or being happy without any wisdom in control. One only meets with ruination. You don't need to look far away to understand this. When you focus your attention here, you can know whether or not there is becoming. Then, when it is happening, are you aware of it? Are you aware of convention and supposition? Do you understand them? It's the grasping attachment that is the vital point, whether or not we are really believing in the designations of me and mine. This grasping is the worm, and it is what causes birth.

Where is this attachment? Grasping onto form, feeling, perception, thoughts, and consciousness, we attach to happiness and unhappiness, and we become obscured and take birth. It happens when we have contact through the senses.

The eyes see forms, and it happens in the present. This is what the Buddha wanted us to look at, to recognize becoming and birth as they occur through our senses. If we know the inner senses and the external objects, we can let go, internally and externally. This can be seen in the present. It's not something that happens when we die from this life. It's the eye seeing forms right now, the ear hearing sounds right now, the nose smelling aromas right now, the tongue tasting flavours right now. Are you taking birth with them? Be aware and recognize birth right as it happens. This way is better.

To do this requires having wisdom to steadily apply mindfulness and clear comprehension. Then you can be aware of yourself and know when you are undergoing becoming and birth. You won't need to ask a fortune-teller.

I have a Dhamma friend in central Thailand. In the old days we practised together, but we went our separate ways long ago. Recently I saw him. He practises the foundations of mindfulness, reciting the *sutta* and giving discourses on it. But he hadn't resolved his doubts yet. He prostrated to me and said, 'Oh, Ajahn, I'm so happy to see you!' I asked him why. He told me he had gone to some shrine where people go for divinations. He held the Buddha statue and said, 'If I have already attained the state of purity, may I be able to raise up this statue. If I have not yet attained the state of purity, may I not be able to raise it up.' And then he was able to raise it up, which made him very delighted. Just this little act, which has no real basis in anything, meant so much to him and made him think he was pure. So he had it engraved on a stone to say, 'I raised up the Buddha statue and have thus attained the state of purity.'

Practitioners of the Dhamma shouldn't be like that. He didn't see himself at all. He was only looking outside and seeing external objects made of stone and cement. He didn't see the intentions and movements in his own mind in the present moment. When our meditation is looking there, we won't have doubts. So the way I see it, our practice may be good, but there's no one who can vouch for us. Like this chapel we are sitting in. It was built by someone with a fourth-grade education. He did a great job, but he has no brand name. He can't provide the guarantee or vouch for himself, showing qualifications like an architect who has the full training and education, but still he does it well. The *saccadhamma* is like this. Even though we haven't studied much and don't know the detailed explanations, we can recognize suffering, we can recognize what brings suffering, and we can let go of it. We don't need to investigate the explanations or anything else. We just look at our minds, look at these matters.

Don't make your practice confusing. Don't create a bunch of doubts for yourself. When you do have doubt, control it by seeing it as merely what it is,

and let go. Really, there is nothing. We create the sense that there is something, but really there's nothing - there is *anattā*. Our doubtful minds think there is something, and then there's *attā*. Then meditation becomes difficult because we think we have to get something and become something. Are you going to practise meditation to get or be something? Is that the correct way? It's only *tanhā* that gets involved in having and becoming. There's no end in sight if you practise like that.

Here, we are talking about cessation, extinguishing. We are talking about everything extinguished, ceasing because of knowledge, not in a state of indifferent ignorance. If we can practise like this and vouch for our own experience, then never mind what anyone else says.

So please don't get lost in doubts about the practice. Don't get attached to your own views. Don't get attached to others' views. Staying in this middle place, wisdom can be born, correctly and to full measure. I've often made the simple analogy of comparing grasping to the place we live. For example, there is the roof and the floor, the upper and lower storeys. If someone goes upstairs, he knows he is up there. If he comes downstairs, he knows he is downstairs, standing on the floor. This is all we can recognize. We can sense where we are, either upstairs or downstairs. But the space in the middle we aren't aware of, because there's no way to identify or measure it - it's just space. We don't comprehend the space in between. But it remains as it is, whether or not anyone descends from upstairs or not. The *saccadhamma* is like that, not going anywhere, not changing. When we say 'no becoming', that is the middle space, not marked or identified by anything. It can't be described.

For example, these days, the youngsters who are interested in Dhamma want to know about Nibbāna. What's it like? But if we tell them about a place without becoming, they don't want to go. They back off. We tell them that this place is cessation, it is peace, but they want to know how they will live, what they will eat and enjoy there. So there's no end to it. The real questions for those who want to know the truth, are questions about how to practise.

There was an *ājīvaka* who met the Buddha. He asked, 'Who is your teacher?' The Buddha replied, 'I was enlightened through my own efforts. I have no teacher.' But his reply was incomprehensible to that wanderer. It was too direct. Their minds were in different places. Even if the wanderer asked all day and all night, there was nothing about it he could understand. The enlightened mind is unmoving and thus can not be recognized. We can develop wisdom and remove our doubts only through practice, nothing else.

So should we not listen to the Dhamma? We should, but then we should put the knowledge we gain into practice. But this doesn't mean that we're

following a person who teaches us; we follow the experience and awareness that arise as we put the teaching into practice. For instance, we feel, 'I really like this thing. I like doing things this way!' But the Dhamma doesn't allow such liking and attachment. If we are really committed to the Dhamma, then we let go of that object of attraction when we see that it is contrary to Dhamma. This is what the knowledge is for.

A lot of talk - you're probably tired by now. Do you have any questions? Well, you probably do; you should have awareness in letting go. Things flow by and you let them go, but not in a dull, indifferent manner, without seeing what is happening. There has to be mindfulness. All the things I've been saying are pointing to having mindfulness protecting you at all times. It means practising with wisdom, not with delusion. Then we will gain true knowledge as wisdom becomes bold and keeps increasing.

¹: *Arom*: (*Thai*) All states (or objects) of mind, whether happy or unhappy, internal or external.

²: literally 'count'

³: Because they are still in the realm of concepts.

Supports for Meditation

Seekers of goodness who have gathered here, please listen in peace. Listening to the Dhamma in peace means to listen with a one-pointed mind, paying attention to what you hear and then letting go. Listening to the Dhamma is of great benefit. While listening to the Dhamma we are encouraged to firmly establish both body and mind in samādhi, because it is one kind of Dhamma practice. In the time of the Buddha people listened to Dhamma talks intently, with a mind aspiring to real understanding, and some actually realized the Dhamma while listening.

This place is well suited to meditation practice. Having stayed here a couple of nights I can see that it is an important place. On the external level it is already peaceful, all that remains is the internal level, your hearts and minds. So I ask all of you to make an effort to pay attention.

Why have you gathered here to practise meditation? It's because your hearts and minds do not understand what should be understood. In other words, you don't truly know how things are, or what is what. You don't know what is wrong and what is right, what it is that brings you suffering and causes you to doubt. So first you have to make yourselves calm. The reason that you have come here to develop calm and restraint is that your hearts and minds are not at ease. Your minds are not calm, not restrained. They are swayed by doubting and agitation. This is why you have come here today and are now listening to the Dhamma.

I would like you to concentrate and listen carefully to what I say, and I ask permission to speak frankly because that's how I am. Please understand that even if I do speak in a forceful manner, I am doing so out of goodwill. I ask your forgiveness if there is anything I say that upsets you, because the customs of Thailand and those of the West are not the same. Actually, speaking a little forcefully can be good because it helps to stir people up who might otherwise be sleepy or drowsy; and rather than rousing themselves to hear the Dhamma, allow themselves to drift instead into complacency, and as a result they never understand anything.

Although there may appear to be many ways to practise, really there is only one. As with fruit trees, it is possible to get fruit quickly by planting a cutting, but the tree would not be resilient or long lasting. Another way is to cultivate a tree right from the seed, which produces a strong and resilient tree. Practice is the same.

When I first began to practise I had problems understanding this. As long as I still didn't know what was what, sitting meditation was a real chore, even

bringing me to tears on occasion. Sometimes I would be aiming too high, other times not high enough, never finding the point of balance. To practise in a way that's peaceful means to place the mind neither too high or too low, but at the point of balance.

I can see that it's very confusing for you, coming from different places and having practised in different ways with different teachers. Coming to practise here, you must be plagued with all kinds of doubts. One teacher says you must practise in one way, another says you should practise another way. You wonder which method to use, unsure of the essence of the practice. The result is confusion. There are so many teachers and so many teachings that nobody knows how to harmonize their practice. As a result there is a lot of doubt and uncertainty.

So you must try not to think too much. If you do think, then do so with awareness. But so far your thinking has been done with no awareness. First you must make your mind calm. Where there is knowing there is no need to think; awareness will arise in its place, and this will in turn become wisdom (paññā). But the ordinary kind of thinking is not wisdom, it is simply the aimless and unaware wandering of the mind, which inevitably results in agitation. This is not wisdom.

At this stage you don't need to think. You've already done a great deal of thinking at home, haven't you? It just stirs up the heart. You must establish some awareness. Obsessive thinking can even bring you tears, just try it out. Getting lost in some train of thought won't lead you to the truth, it's not wisdom. The Buddha was a very wise person, he'd learned how to stop thinking. In the same way you are practising here in order to stop thinking and thereby arrive at peace. If you are already calm it is not necessary to think, wisdom will arise in its place.

To meditate you do not have to think much more than to resolve that right now is the time for training the mind and nothing else. Don't let the mind shoot off to the left or to the right, to the front or behind, above or below. Our only duty right now is to practise mindfulness of the breathing. Fix your attention at the head and move it down through the body to the tips of the feet, and then back up to the crown of the head. Pass your awareness down through the body, observing with wisdom. We do this to gain an initial understanding of the way the body is. Then begin the meditation, noting that at this time your sole duty is to observe the inhalations and exhalations. Don't force the breath to be any longer or shorter than normal, just allow it to continue easily. Don't put any pressure on the breath, rather let it flow evenly, letting go with each in-breath and out-breath.

You must understand that you are letting go as you do this, but there should

still be awareness. You must maintain this awareness, allowing the breath to enter and leave comfortably. There is no need to force the breath, just allow it to flow easily and naturally. Maintain the resolve that at this time you have no other duties or responsibilities. Thoughts about what will happen, what you will know or see during the meditation may arise from time to time, but once they arise just let them cease by themselves, don't be unduly concerned over them.

During the meditation there is no need to pay attention to sense impressions. Whenever the mind is affected by sense impingement, wherever there is a feeling or sensation in the mind, just let it go. Whether those sensations are good or bad is unimportant. It is not necessary to make anything out of those sensations, just let them pass away and return your attention to the breath. Maintain the awareness of the breath entering and leaving. Don't create suffering over the breath being too long or too short, simply observe it without trying to control or suppress it in any way. In other words, don't attach. Allow the breath to continue as it is, and the mind will become calm. As you continue the mind will gradually lay things down and come to rest, the breath becoming lighter and lighter until it becomes so faint that it seems like it's not there at all. Both the body and the mind will feel light and energized. All that will remain will be a one-pointed knowing. You could say that the mind has changed and reached a state of calm.

If the mind is agitated, set up mindfulness and inhale deeply till there is no space left to store any air, then release it all completely until none remains. Follow this with another deep inhalation until you are full, then release the air again. Do this two or three times, then re-establish concentration. The mind should be calmer. If anymore sense impressions cause agitation in the mind, repeat the process on every occasion. Similarly with walking meditation. If while walking, the mind becomes agitated, stop still, calm the mind, re-establish the awareness with the meditation object and then continue walking. Sitting and walking meditation are in essence the same, differing only in terms of the physical posture used.

Sometimes there may be doubt, so you must have sati, to be the one who knows, continually following and examining the agitated mind in whatever form it takes. This is to have sati. Sati watches over and takes care of the mind. You must maintain this knowing and not be careless or wander astray, no matter what condition the mind takes on.

The trick is to have sati taking control and supervising the mind. Once the mind is unified with sati a new kind of awareness will emerge. The mind that has developed calm is held in check by that calm, just like a chicken held in a coop; the chicken is unable to wander outside, but it can still move around

within the coop. Its walking to and fro doesn't get it into trouble because it is restrained by the coop. Likewise the awareness that takes place when the mind has sati and is calm does not cause trouble. None of the thinking or sensations that take place within the calm mind cause harm or disturbance.

Some people don't want to experience any thoughts or feelings at all, but this is going too far. Feelings arise within the state of calm. The mind is both experiencing feelings and calm at the same time, without being disturbed. When there is calm like this there are no harmful consequences. Problems occur when the 'chicken' gets out of the 'coop'. For instance, you may be watching the breath entering and leaving and then forget yourself, allowing the mind to wander away from the breath, back home, off to the shops or to any number of different places. Maybe even half an hour passes before you suddenly realize you're supposed to be practising meditation and reprimand yourself for your lack of sati. This is where you have to be really careful, because this is where the chicken gets out of the coop - the mind leaves its base of calm.

You must take care to maintain the awareness with sati and try to pull the mind back. Although I use the words 'pull the mind back', in fact the mind doesn't really go anywhere, only the object of awareness has changed. You must make the mind stay right here and now. As long as there is sati there will be presence of mind. It seems like you are pulling the mind back but really it hasn't gone anywhere, it has simply changed a little. It seems that the mind goes here and there, but in fact the change occurs right at the one spot. When sati is regained, in a flash you are back with the mind without it having to be brought from anywhere.

When there is total knowing, a continuous and unbroken awareness at each and every moment, this is called presence of mind. If your attention drifts from the breath to other places then the knowing is broken. Whenever there is awareness of the breath the mind is there. With just the breath and this even and continuous awareness you have presence of mind.

There must be both sati and *sampajañña*. Sati is recollection and *sampajañña* is self-awareness. Right now you are clearly aware of the breath. This exercise of watching the breath helps sati and *sampajañña* develop together. They share the work. Having both sati and *sampajañña* is like having two workers to lift a heavy plank of wood. Suppose there are two people trying to lift some heavy planks, but the weight is so great, they have to strain so hard, that it's almost unendurable. Then another person, imbued with goodwill, sees them and rushes in to help. In the same way, when there is sati and *sampajañña*, then paññā (wisdom) will arise at the same place to help out. Then all three of them support each other.

With paññā there will be an understanding of sense objects. For instance, during the meditation sense objects are experienced which give rise to feelings and moods. You may start to think of a friend, but then paññā should immediately counter with ‘It doesn’t matter,’ ‘Stop’ or ‘Forget it.’ Or if there are thoughts about where you will go tomorrow, then the response would be, ‘I’m not interested, I don’t want to concern myself with such things.’ Maybe you start thinking about other people, then you should think, ‘No, I don’t want to get involved.’ ‘Just let go,’ or ‘It’s all uncertain and never a sure thing.’ This is how you should deal with things in meditation, recognizing them as ‘not sure, not sure’, and maintaining this kind of awareness.

You must give up all the thinking, the inner dialogue and the doubting. Don’t get caught up in these things during the meditation. In the end all that will remain in the mind in its purest form are sati, *sampajañña* and paññā. Whenever these things weaken doubts will arise, but try to abandon those doubts immediately, leaving only sati, *sampajañña* and paññā. Try to develop sati like this until it can be maintained at all times. Then you will understand sati, *sampajañña* and samādhi thoroughly.

Focusing the attention at this point there will be sati, *sampajañña*, samādhi and paññā together. Whether you are attracted to or repelled by external sense objects, you will be able to tell yourself, ‘It’s not sure.’ Either way they are just hindrances to be swept away till the mind is clean. All that should remain is sati, recollection; *sampajañña*, clear awareness; samādhi, the firm and unwavering mind; and paññā, or consummate wisdom. For the time being I will say just this much on the subject of meditation.

Now, about the tools or aids to meditation practice - there should be *mettā* (goodwill) in your heart; in other words, the qualities of generosity, kindness and helpfulness. These should be maintained as the foundation for mental purity. For example, begin doing away with *lobha*, or selfishness, by giving. When people are selfish they aren’t happy. Selfishness leads to a sense of discontent, and yet people tend to be very selfish without realizing how it affects them.

You can experience this at any time, especially when you are hungry. Suppose you get some apples and you have the opportunity to share them with a friend; you think it over for a while, and, sure, the intention to give is there all right, but you want to give the smaller one. To give the big one would be ... well, such a shame. It’s hard to think straight. You tell them to go ahead and take one, but then you say, ‘Take this one!’ and give them the smaller apple! This is one form of selfishness that people usually don’t notice. Have you ever been like this?

You really have to go against the grain to give. Even though you may really

only want to give the smaller apple, you must force yourself to give away the bigger one. Of course, once you have given it to your friend, you feel good inside. Training the mind by going against the grain in this way requires self-discipline - you must know how to give and how to give up, not allowing selfishness to stick. Once you learn how to give, if you are still hesitating over which fruit to give, then while you are deliberating you will be troubled, and even if you give the bigger one, there will still be a sense of reluctance. But as soon as you firmly decide to give the bigger one, the matter is over and done with. This is going against the grain in the right way.

Doing this you win mastery over yourself. If you can't do it you will be a victim of yourself and continue to be selfish. All of us have been selfish in the past. This is a defilement which needs to be cut off. In the Pāli scriptures, giving is called '*dāna*,' which means bringing happiness to others. It is one of those conditions which help to cleanse the mind from defilement. Reflect on this and develop it in your practice.

You may think that practising like this involves hounding yourself, but it doesn't really. Actually it's hounding craving and the defilements. If defilements arise within you, you have to do something to remedy them. Defilements are like a stray cat. If you give it as much food as it wants, it will always be coming around looking for more food, but if you stop feeding it, after a couple of days it'll stop coming around. It's the same with the defilements, they won't come to disturb you, they'll leave your mind in peace. So rather than being afraid of defilement, make the defilements afraid of you. To make the defilements afraid of you, you must see the Dhamma within your minds.

Where does the Dhamma arise? It arises with our knowing and understanding in this way. Everyone is able to know and understand the Dhamma. It's not something that has to be found in books, you don't have to do a lot of study to see it, just reflect right now and you can see what I am talking about. Everybody can see it because it exists right within our hearts. Everybody has defilements, don't they? If you are able to see them, you can understand. In the past you've looked after and pampered your defilements, but now you must know your defilements and not allow them to come and bother you.

The next constituent of practice is moral restraint (*sīla*). *Sīla* watches over and nurtures the practice in the same way as parents look after their children. Maintaining moral restraint means not only to avoid harming others but also to help and encourage them. At the very least you should maintain the Five Precepts, which are:

1. Not only not to kill or deliberately harm others, but to spread goodwill towards all beings.
2. To be honest, refraining from infringing on the rights of others, in other words, not stealing.
3. Knowing moderation in sexual relations: In the household life there exists the family structure, based around husband and wife. Know who your husband or wife is, know moderation, know the proper bounds of sexual activity. Some people don't know the limits. One husband or wife isn't enough, they have to have a second or third. The way I see it, you can't consume even one partner completely, so to have two or three is just plain indulgence. You must try to cleanse the mind and train it to know moderation. Knowing moderation is true purity, without it there are no limits to your behaviour. When eating delicious food, don't dwell too much on how it tastes, think of your stomach and consider how much is appropriate to its needs. If you eat too much you get trouble, so you must know moderation.
4. To be honest in speech – this is also a tool for eradicating defilements. You must be honest and straight, truthful and upright.
5. To refrain from taking intoxicants. You must know restraint and preferably give these things up altogether. People are already intoxicated enough with their families, relatives and friends, material possessions, wealth and all the rest of it. That's quite enough already without making things worse by taking intoxicants as well. These things just create darkness in the mind. Those who take large amounts should try to gradually cut down and eventually give it up altogether.

Maybe I should ask your forgiveness, but my speaking in this way is out of a concern for your benefit, so that you can understand that which is good. You need to know what is what. What are the things that are oppressing you in your everyday lives? What are the actions which cause this oppression? Good actions bring good results and bad actions bring bad results. These are the causes.

Once moral restraint is pure there will be a sense of honesty and kindness towards others. This will bring about contentment and freedom from worries and remorse. Remorse resulting from aggressive and hurtful behaviour will not be there. This is a form of happiness. It is almost like a heavenly state. There is comfort, you eat and sleep in comfort with the happiness arising from moral restraint. This is the result; maintaining moral restraint is the cause. This is a principle of Dhamma practice - refraining from bad actions so that goodness can arise. If moral restraint is maintained in this way, evil will disappear and good will arise in its place. This is the result of right practice.

But this isn't the end of the story. Once people have attained some happiness they tend to be heedless and not go any further in the practice. They get stuck on happiness. They don't want to progress any further, they prefer the happiness of 'heaven'. It's comfortable but there's no real understanding. You must keep reflecting to avoid being deluded. Reflect again and again on the disadvantages of this happiness. It's transient, it doesn't last forever. Soon you are separated from it. It's not a sure thing; once happiness disappears then suffering arises in its place and the tears come again. Even heavenly beings end up crying and suffering.

So the Lord Buddha taught us to reflect on the disadvantages of happiness, that there exists an unsatisfactory side to it. Usually when this kind of happiness is experienced, there is no real understanding of it. The peace that is truly certain and lasting is covered over by this deceptive happiness. This happiness is not a certain or permanent kind of peace, but rather a form of defilement, a refined form of defilement to which we attach. Everybody likes to be happy. Happiness arises because of our liking for something. As soon as that liking changes to dislike, suffering arises. We must reflect on this happiness to see its uncertainty and limitation. Once things change suffering arises. This suffering is also uncertain; don't think that it is fixed or absolute. This kind of reflection is called *ādīnavakathā*, the reflection on the inadequacy and limitation of the conditioned world. This means to reflect on happiness rather than accepting it at face value. Seeing that it is uncertain, you shouldn't cling fast to it. You should take hold of it but then let it go, seeing both the benefit and the harm of happiness. To meditate skilfully you have to see the disadvantages inherent within happiness. Reflect in this way. When happiness arises, contemplate it thoroughly until the disadvantages become apparent.

When you see that things are imperfect (*dukkha*) your heart will come to understand the *nekkhammakathā*, the reflection on renunciation. The mind will become disinterested and seek for a way out. Disinterest comes from having seen the way forms really are, the way tastes really are, the way love and hatred really are. By disinterest we mean that there is no longer the desire to cling to or attach to things. There is a withdrawal from clinging, to a point where you can abide comfortably, observing with an equanimity that is free of attachment. This is the peace that arises from practice.

Still, Flowing Water

Now please pay attention, not allowing your mind to wander off after other things. Create the feeling that right now you are sitting on a mountain or in a forest somewhere, all by yourself. What do you have sitting here right now? There is body and mind, that's all, only these two things. All that is contained within this frame sitting here now is called 'body'. The 'mind' is that which is aware and is thinking at this very moment. These two things are also called *nāma* and *rūpa*. *Nāma* refers to that which has no *rūpa*, or form. All thoughts and feelings, or the four mental khandhas of feeling, perception, volition and consciousness, are *nāma*, they are all formless. When the eye sees form, that form is called *rūpa*, while the awareness is called *nāma*. Together they are called *nāma* and *rūpa*, or simply mind and body.

Understand that only body and mind are sitting here in this present moment. But we get these two things confused with each other. If you want peace you must know the truth of them. The mind in its present state is still untrained; it's dirty, not clear. It is not yet the pure mind. We must train this mind further through the practice of meditation.

Some people think that meditation means to sit in some special way, but in actual fact standing, sitting, walking and reclining are all vehicles for meditation practice. You can practise at all times. Samādhi literally means 'the firmly established mind.' To develop samādhi you don't have to go bottling the mind up. Some people try to get peaceful by sitting quietly and having nothing disturb them at all, but that's just like being dead. The practice of samādhi is for developing wisdom and understanding.

Samādhi is the firm mind, the one-pointed mind. On which point is it fixed? It's fixed on the point of balance. That's its point. But people practise meditation by trying to silence their minds. They say, 'I try to sit in meditation but my mind won't be still for a minute. One instant it flies off one place, the next instant it flies off somewhere else. How can I make it stop and be still?' You don't have to make it stop, that's not the point. Where there is movement is where understanding can arise. People complain, 'It runs off and I pull it back again; then it goes off again and I pull it back once more.' So they just sit there pulling back and forth like this.

They think their minds are running all over the place, but actually it only seems like the mind is running around. For example, look at this hall here. 'Oh, it's so big!' you say. Actually it's not big at all. Whether or not it seems big depends on your perception of it. In fact this hall is just the size it is, neither big nor small, but people run around after their feelings all the time.

In order to meditate to find peace, you must understand what peace is. If you don't understand it you won't be able to find it. For example, suppose today you brought a very expensive pen with you to the monastery. Now suppose that, on your way here, you put the pen in your front pocket, but later you put it in the back pocket. Now when you search your front pocket, it's not there! You get a fright. You get a fright because of your misunderstanding, you don't see the truth of the matter. Suffering is the result. Whether standing, walking, coming and going, you can't stop worrying about your lost pen. Your wrong understanding causes you to suffer. Understanding wrongly causes suffering. 'Such a shame! I only bought that pen a few days ago and now it's lost.'

But then you remember, 'Oh, of course! When I went to bathe I put the pen in my back pocket.' As soon as you remember this you feel better again, even without seeing your pen. You see that? You're happy again, you can stop worrying about your pen. You're sure about it now. As you're walking along you run your hand over your back pocket and there it is. Your mind was deceiving you all along. The worry comes from your ignorance. Now, seeing the pen, you are beyond doubt, your worries are calmed. This sort of peace comes from seeing the cause of the problem, *samudaya*, the cause of suffering. As soon as you remember that the pen is in your back pocket there is *nirodha*, the cessation of suffering.

So you must contemplate in order to find peace. What people usually refer to as peace is simply the calming of the mind, not the calming of the defilements. The defilements are simply being temporarily subdued, just like grass covered by a rock. In three or four days you take the rock off the grass and in no long time it grows up again. The grass hadn't really died, it was simply being suppressed. It's the same when sitting in meditation: the mind is calmed but the defilements are not really calmed. Therefore, *samādhi* is not a sure thing. To find real peace you must develop wisdom. *Samādhi* is one kind of peace, like the rock covering the grass. In a few days you take the rock away and the grass grows up again. This is only a temporary peace. The peace of wisdom is like putting the rock down and not lifting it up, just leaving it where it is. The grass can't possibly grow again. This is real peace, the calming of the defilements, the sure peace which results from wisdom.

We speak of wisdom (*paññā*) and *samādhi* as separate things, but in essence they are one and the same. Wisdom is the dynamic function of *samādhi*; *samādhi* is the passive aspect of wisdom. They arise from the same place but take different directions. They have different functions, like this mango here. A small green mango eventually grows larger and larger until it is ripe. It is the same mango, the small one, the larger one and the ripe one are the same mango, but its condition changes. In Dhamma practice, one condition is

called samādhi, the later condition is called paññā, but in actuality sīla, samādhi, and paññā are all the same thing, just like the mango.

In any case, in our practice, no matter what aspect you refer to, you must always begin from the mind. Do you know what this mind is? What is the mind like? What is it? Where is it? Nobody knows. All we know is that we want to go over here or over there, we want this and we want that, we feel good or we feel bad, but the mind itself seems impossible to know. What is the mind? The mind doesn't have form. That which receives impressions, both good and bad, we call 'mind'. It's like the owner of a house. The owner stays at home while visitors come to see him. He is the one who receives the visitors. Who receives sense impressions? What is it that perceives? Who lets go of sense impressions? That is what we call 'mind'. But people can't see it, they think themselves around in circles. 'What is the mind, what is the brain?' Don't confuse the issue like this. What is it that receives impressions? Some impressions it likes and some it doesn't like. Who is that? Is there one who likes and dislikes? Sure there is, but you can't see it. That is what we call 'mind'.

In our practice it isn't necessary to talk of samatha or vipassanā; just call it the practice of Dhamma, that's enough. And conduct this practice from your own mind. What is the mind? The mind is that which receives, or is aware of, sense impressions. With some sense impressions there is a reaction of like, with others the reaction is dislike. The receiver of impressions leads us into happiness and suffering, right and wrong. But it doesn't have any form. We assume it to be a self, but it's really only *nāmadhamma*. Does 'goodness' have any form? Does evil? Do happiness and suffering have any form? You can't find them. Are they round or are they square, short or long? Can you see them? These things are *nāmadhamma*, they can't be compared to material things, they are formless, but we know that they do exist.

Therefore, it is said, to begin the practice by calming the mind. Put awareness into the mind. If the mind is aware it will be at peace. Some people don't go for awareness, they just want to have peace, a kind of blanking out. So they never learn anything. If we don't have this 'one who knows', what is there to base our practice on?

If there is no long, there is no short, if there is no right, there can be no wrong. People these days study away, looking for good and evil. But that which is beyond good and evil they know nothing of. All they know is the right and the wrong - 'I'm going to take only what is right. I don't want to know about the wrong. Why should I?' If you try to take only what is right in a short time it will go wrong again. Right leads to wrong. People keep searching among the right and wrong, they don't try to find that which is neither right nor

wrong. They study about good and evil, they search for virtue, but they know nothing of that which is beyond good and evil. They study the long and the short, but that which is neither long nor short they know nothing of.

This knife has a blade, an edge and a handle. Can you lift only the blade? Can you lift only the the edge of the blade, or the handle? The handle, the edge and the blade are all parts of the same knife: when you pick up the knife you get all three parts together.

In the same way, if you pick up that which is good, the bad must follow. People search for goodness and try to throw away evil, but they don't study that which is neither good nor evil. If you don't study this, there can be no completion. If you pick up goodness, badness follows. If you pick up happiness, suffering follows. The practice of clinging to goodness and rejecting evil is the Dhamma of children, it's like a toy. Sure, it's all right, you can take just this much, but if you grab onto goodness, evil will follow. The end of this path is confused, it's not so good.

Take a simple example. You have children - now suppose you want to only love them and never experience hatred. This is the thinking of one who doesn't know human nature. If you hold onto love, hatred will follow. In the same way, people decide to study the Dhamma to develop wisdom, studying good and evil as closely as possible. Now, having known good and evil, what do they do? They try to cling to the good, and evil follows. They didn't study that which is beyond good and evil. This is what you should study.

'I'm going to be like this,' 'I'm going to be like that,' but they never say, 'I'm not going to be anything because there really isn't any 'I'. This they don't study. All they want is goodness. If they attain goodness, they lose themselves in it. If things get too good they'll start to go bad, and so people end up just swinging back and forth like this.

In order to calm the mind and become aware of the perceiver of sense impressions, we must observe it. Follow the 'one who knows'. Train the mind until it is pure. How pure should you make it? If it's really pure, the mind should be above both good and evil, above even purity. It's finished. That's when the practice is finished.

What people call sitting in meditation is merely a temporary kind of peace. But even in such peace there are experiences. If an experience arises there must be someone who knows it, who looks into it, queries it and examines it. If the mind is simply blank then that's not so useful. You may see some people who look very restrained and think they are peaceful, but the real peace is not simply the peaceful mind. It's not the peace which says, 'May I be happy and never experience any suffering.' With this kind of peace,

eventually even the attainment of happiness becomes unsatisfying. Suffering results. Only when you can make your mind beyond both happiness and suffering will you find true peace. That's the true peace. This is the subject most people never study, they never really see this one.

The right way to train the mind is to make it bright, to develop wisdom. Don't think that training the mind is simply sitting quietly. That's the rock covering the grass. People get drunk over it. They think that samādhi is sitting. That's just one of the words for samādhi. But really, if the mind has samādhi, then walking is samādhi, sitting is samādhi, there is samādhi in the sitting posture, in the walking posture, in the standing and reclining postures. It's all practice.

Some people complain, 'I can't meditate, I'm too restless. Whenever I sit down I think of this and that. I can't do it. I've got too much bad kamma I should use up my bad kamma first and then come back and try meditating.' Sure, just try it. Try using up your bad kamma.

This is how people think. Why do they think like this? These so-called hindrances are the things we must study. Whenever we sit, the mind immediately goes running off. We follow it and try to bring it back and observe it once more, then it goes off again. This is what you're supposed to be studying. Most people refuse to learn their lessons from nature, like a naughty schoolboy who refuses to do his homework. They don't want to see the mind changing. How then are you going to develop wisdom? We have to live with change like this. When we know that the mind is just this way, constantly changing, when we know that this is its nature, we will understand it. We have to know when the mind is thinking good and bad, changing all the time, we have to know these things. If we understand this point, then even while we are thinking we can be at peace.

For example, suppose at home you have a pet monkey. Monkeys don't stay still for long, they like to jump around and grab onto things. That's how monkeys are. Now you come to the monastery and see the monkey here. This monkey doesn't stay still either, it jumps around just the same. But it doesn't bother you, does it? Why doesn't it bother you? Because you've raised a monkey before, you know what they're like. If you know just one monkey, no matter how many provinces you go to, no matter how many monkeys you see, you won't be bothered by them, will you? This is one who understands monkeys.

If we understand monkeys, then we won't become a monkey. If you don't understand monkeys you may become a monkey yourself! Do you understand? When you see it reaching for this and that, you shout, 'Hey!' You get angry. 'That damned monkey!' This is one who doesn't know monkeys. One who knows monkeys sees that the monkey at home and the monkey in

the monastery are just the same. Why should you get annoyed by them? When you see what monkeys are like, that's enough, you can be at peace.

Peace is like this. We must know sensations. Some sensations are pleasant, some are unpleasant, but that's not important. That's just their business. Just like the monkey, all monkeys are the same. We understand sensations as sometimes agreeable, sometimes not - that's just their nature. We should understand them and know how to let them go. Sensations are uncertain. They are transient, imperfect and ownerless. Everything that we perceive is like this. When eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind receive sensations, we know them, just like knowing the monkey. Then we can be at peace.

When sensations arise, know them. Why do you run after them? Sensations are uncertain. One minute they are one way, the next minute another. They exist dependent on change. And all of us here exist dependent on change. The breath goes out, then it must come in. It must have this change. Try only breathing in, can you do that? Or try just breathing out without taking in another breath, can you do it? If there was no change like this, how long could you live for? There must be both the in-breath and the out-breath.

Sensations are the same. There must be these things. If there were no sensations, you couldn't develop wisdom. If there is no wrong, there can be no right. You must be right first before you can see what is wrong, and you must understand the wrong first to be right. This is how things are.

For the really earnest student, the more sensations the better. But many meditators shrink away from sensations, they don't want to deal with them. This is like the naughty schoolboy who won't go to school, won't listen to the teacher. These sensations are teaching us. When we know sensations, then we are practising Dhamma. The peace within sensations is just like understanding the monkey here. When you understand what monkeys are like, you are no longer troubled by them.

The practice of Dhamma is like this. It's not that the Dhamma is very far away, it's right with us. The Dhamma isn't about the angels on high or anything like that. It's simply about us, about what we are doing right now. Observe yourself. Sometimes there is happiness, sometimes suffering, sometimes comfort, sometimes pain, sometimes love, sometimes hate. This is Dhamma. Do you see it? You should know this Dhamma, you have to read your experiences.

You must know sensations before you can let them go. When you see that sensations are impermanent you will be untroubled by them. As soon as a sensation arises, just say to yourself, 'Hmmm, this is not a sure thing.' When your mood changes, 'Hmmm, not sure.' You can be at peace with these

things, just like seeing the monkey and not being bothered by it. If you know the truth of sensations, that is knowing the Dhamma. You let go of sensations, seeing that invariably, they are all uncertain.

What we call uncertainty, here, is the Buddha. The Buddha is the Dhamma. The Dhamma is the characteristic of uncertainty. Whoever sees the uncertainty of things sees the unchanging reality of things. That's what the Dhamma is like. And that is the Buddha. If you see the Dhamma you see the Buddha; seeing the Buddha, you see the Dhamma. If you know *aniccam*, (uncertainty), you will let go of things and not grasp onto them.

You say, 'Hey, don't break my glass!' Can you prevent something that is breakable from breaking? If it doesn't break now it will break later on. If you don't break it, someone else will. If someone else doesn't break it, one of the chickens will! The Buddha says to accept this. He penetrated the truth of these things, seeing that this glass is already broken. Whenever you use this glass you should reflect that it's already broken. Do you understand this? The Buddha's understanding was like this. He saw the broken glass within the unbroken one. Whenever its time is up it will break. Develop this kind of understanding. Use the glass, look after it, until when, one day, it slips out of your hand. 'Smash!' No problem. Why is there no problem? Because you saw its brokenness before it broke!

But usually people say, 'I love this glass so much, may it never break.' Later on the dog breaks it. 'I'll kill that damn dog!' You hate the dog for breaking your glass. If one of your children breaks it you'll hate them too. Why is this? Because you've dammed yourself up, the water can't flow. You've made a dam without a spillway. The only thing the dam can do is burst, right? When you make a dam you must make a spillway also. When the water rises up too high, the water can flow off safely. When it's full to the brim you open your spillway. You have to have a safety valve like this. Impermanence is the safety valve of the Noble Ones. If you have this 'safety valve' you will be at peace.

Practise constantly, standing, walking, sitting, lying down, using sati to watch over and protect the mind. This is samādhi and wisdom. They are both the same thing, but they have different aspects.

If we really see uncertainty clearly, we will see that which is certain. The certainty is that things must inevitably be this way, they can not be otherwise. Do you understand? Knowing just this much you can know the Buddha, you can rightly do reverence to him.

As long as you don't throw out the Buddha you won't suffer. As soon as you throw out the Buddha you will experience suffering. As soon as you throw

out the reflections on transience, imperfection and ownerlessness you'll have suffering. If you can practise just this much it's enough; suffering won't arise, or if it does arise you can settle it easily, and it will be a cause for suffering not arising in the future. This is the end of our practice, at the point where suffering doesn't arise. And why doesn't suffering arise? Because we have sorted out the cause of suffering, *samudaya*.

For instance, if this glass were to break, you would experience suffering. We know that this glass will be a cause for suffering, so we get rid of the cause. All dhammas arise because of a cause. They must also cease because of a cause. So, if there is suffering on account of this glass here, we should let go of this cause. If we reflect beforehand that this glass is already broken, even when it isn't, the cause ceases. When there is no longer any cause, that suffering is no longer able to exist; it ceases. This is cessation.

You don't have to go beyond this point, just this much is enough. Contemplate this in your own mind. Basically you should all have the Five Precepts as a foundation for behaviour. It's not necessary to go and study the Tipitaka, just concentrate on the Five Precepts first. At first you will make mistakes. When you realize it, stop, come back and establish your precepts again. Maybe you'll go astray and make another mistake. When you realize it, re-establish yourself.

Practising like this, your sati will improve and become more consistent, just like the drops of water falling from a kettle. If we tilt the kettle just a little, the drops fall out slowly; plop! ... plop! ... plop! ... If we tilt the kettle up a little bit more, the drops become more rapid; plop, plop, plop! ... If we tilt the kettle up even further the 'plops' go away and the water flows into a steady stream. Where do the 'plops' go to? They don't go anywhere, they change into a steady stream of water.

We have to talk about the Dhamma like this, using similes, because the Dhamma has no form. Is it square or is it round? You can't say. The only way to talk about it is through similes like this. Don't think that the Dhamma is far away from you. It lies right with you, all around. Take a look; one minute you are happy, the next sad, the next angry. It's all Dhamma. Look at it and understand. Whatever it is that causes suffering, you should remedy. If suffering is still there, take another look, you don't yet see clearly. If you could see clearly you wouldn't suffer because the cause would no longer be there. If suffering is still there, if you're still having to endure, then you're not yet on the right track. Wherever you get stuck, whenever you're suffering too much, right there you're wrong. Whenever you're so happy you're floating in the clouds, there, wrong again!

If you practise like this, you will have sati at all times, in all postures. With

sati, and *sampajañña*, you will know right and wrong, happiness and suffering. Knowing these things, you will know how to deal with them.

I teach meditation like this. When it's time to sit in meditation then sit, that's not wrong. You should practise this also. But meditation is not only sitting. You must allow your mind to fully experience things, allow them to flow and consider their nature. How should you consider them? See them as transient, imperfect and ownerless. It's all uncertain. 'This is so beautiful, I really must have it.' That's not a sure thing. 'I don't like this at all'. Tell yourself right there, 'Not sure!' Is this true? Absolutely, no mistake. But just try taking things for real. 'I'm going to get this thing for sure.' You've gone off the track already. Don't do this. No matter how much you like something, you should reflect that it's uncertain.

Some kinds of food seem so delicious, but still you should reflect that it's not a sure thing. It may seem so sure, that it's so delicious, but still you must tell yourself, 'Not sure!' If you want to test out whether it's sure or not, try eating your favourite food every day. Every single day, mind you. Eventually you'll complain, 'This doesn't taste so good anymore.' Eventually you'll think, 'Actually I prefer that kind of food.' That's not a sure thing either! You must allow things to flow, just like the in and out breaths. There has to be both the in breath and the out breath, the breathing depends on change. Everything depends on change like this.

These things lie with us, nowhere else. If we no longer doubt, whether sitting, standing, walking, or reclining, we will be at peace. Samādhi isn't just sitting. Some people sit until they fall into a stupor. They might as well be dead, they can't tell north from south. Don't take it to such an extreme. If you feel sleepy, then walk, change your posture. Develop wisdom. If you are really tired, have a rest. As soon as you wake up then continue the practice, don't let yourself drift into a stupor. You must practise like this. Have reason, wisdom, circumspection.

Start the practice with your own mind and body, seeing them as impermanent. Everything else is the same. Keep this in mind when you think the food is so delicious, you must tell yourself, 'Not a sure thing!' You have to whack it first. But usually it just whacks you every time, doesn't it? If you don't like anything, you just suffer over it. This is how things whack us. 'If she likes me, I like her.' They whack us again. You never get a punch in! You must see it like this. Whenever you like anything just say to yourself, 'This is not a sure thing!' You have to go against the grain somewhat in order to really see the Dhamma.

Practise in all postures, sitting, standing, walking, lying. You can experience anger in any posture, right? You can be angry while walking, while sitting,

while lying down. You can experience desire in any posture. So our practice must extend to all postures; standing, walking, sitting and lying down. It must be consistent. Don't just put on a show, really do it.

While sitting in meditation, some incident might arise. Before it is settled another one comes racing in. Whenever these things come up, just tell yourself, 'Not sure, not sure.' Just whack it before it gets a chance to whack you.

Now this is the important point. If you know that all things are impermanent, all your thinking will gradually unwind. When you reflect on the uncertainty of everything that passes, you'll see that all things go the same way. Whenever anything arises, all you need to say is, 'Oh, another one!'

Have you ever seen flowing water? Have you ever seen still water? If your mind is peaceful, it will be just like still, flowing water. Have you ever seen still, flowing water? There! You've only ever seen flowing water and still water, haven't you? But you've never seen still, flowing water. Right there, right where your thinking can not take you, even though it's peaceful you can develop wisdom. Your mind will be like flowing water, and yet it's still. It's almost as if it were still, and yet it's flowing. So I call it 'still, flowing water.' Wisdom can arise here.

Toward the Unconditioned

Today is the day on which we Buddhists come together to observe the *uposatha* precepts and listen to the Dhamma, as is our custom. The point of listening to the Dhamma is, firstly, to create some understanding of the things we don't yet understand; to clarify them and secondly, to improve our grasp of the things we understand already. We must rely on Dhamma talks to improve our understanding, and listening is the crucial factor.

For today's talk please pay special attention. First of all, straighten up your posture to make it suitable for listening. Don't be too tense. Now, all that remains is to establish your minds, making your minds firm in *samādhi*. The mind is the important ingredient. The mind is that which perceives good and evil, right and wrong. If we are lacking in *sati* for even one minute, we are crazy for that minute; if we are lacking in *sati* for half an hour, we will be crazy for half an hour. However much our mind is lacking in *sati*, that's how crazy we are. That's why it's especially important to pay attention when listening to the Dhamma.

All creatures in this world are plagued by nothing other than suffering. There is only suffering disturbing the mind. The purpose of studying the Dhamma is to utterly destroy this suffering. If suffering arises, it's because we don't really know it. No matter how much we try to control it through will power, or through wealth and possessions, it is impossible. If we don't thoroughly understand suffering and its cause, no matter how much we try to 'trade it off' with our deeds, thoughts or worldly riches, there's no way we can get rid of it. Only through clear knowledge and awareness, through knowing the truth of it, can suffering disappear. And this applies not only to homeless ones, the monks and novices, but also to householders. For anybody who knows the truth of things, suffering automatically ceases.

The states of good and evil are constant truths. Dhamma means that which is constant, which maintains itself. Turmoil maintains its turmoil, serenity maintains its serenity. Good and evil maintain their respective conditions - like hot water: it maintains its hotness, it doesn't change for anybody. Whether a young person or an old person drinks it, it's hot. It's hot for every nationality of people. So Dhamma is defined as that which maintains its condition. In our practice we must know heat and coolness, right and wrong, good and evil. Knowing evil, for example, we will not create the causes for evil, and evil will not arise.

Dhamma practitioners should know the source of the various dhammas. By quelling the cause of heat, heat can not arise. The same with evil: it arises from a cause. If we practise the Dhamma till we know the Dhamma, we will

know the source of things, their causes. If we extinguish the cause of evil, evil is also extinguished, we don't have to go running after evil to put it out.

This is the practice of Dhamma. But many study the Dhamma, learn it, even practise it, but are not yet with the Dhamma, and have not yet quenched the cause of evil and turmoil within their own hearts. As long as the cause of heat is still present, we can't possibly prevent heat from being there. In the same way, as long as the cause of confusion is within our minds, we can not possibly prevent confusion from being there, because it arises from this source. As long as the source is not quenched, confusion will arise again.

Whenever we create good actions, goodness arises in the mind. It arises from its cause. This is called *kusala*. If we understand causes in this way, we can create those causes and the results will naturally follow.

But people don't usually create the right causes. They want goodness so much, and yet they don't work to bring it about. All they get are bad results, embroiling the mind in suffering. All people want these days is money. They think that if they just get enough money everything will be all right; so they spend all their time looking for money, they don't look for goodness. This is like wanting meat, but not wanting salt to preserve it. You just leave the meat around the house to rot. Those who want money should know not only how to find it, but also how to look after it. If you want meat, you can't expect to buy it and then just leave it laying around in the house. It'll just go rotten. This kind of thinking is wrong. The result of wrong thinking is turmoil and confusion. The Buddha taught the Dhamma so that people would put it into practice, in order to know it and see it, and to be one with it, to make the mind Dhamma. When the mind is Dhamma, it will attain happiness and contentment. The restlessness of *samsāra* is in this world, and the cessation of suffering is also in this world.

The practice of Dhamma is therefore for leading the mind to the transcendence of suffering. The body can't transcend suffering - having been born it must experience pain and sickness, ageing and death. Only the mind can transcend clinging and grasping. All the teachings of the Buddha, which we call *pariyatti*, are a skilful means to this end. For instance, the Buddha taught about *upādinnaka-sankhārā* and *anupādinnaka-sankhārā*; mind-attended conditions and non-mind-attended conditions. Non-mind-attended conditions are usually defined as such things as trees, mountains, rivers and so on - inanimate things. Mind-attended conditions are defined as animate things - animals, human beings and so on. Most students of Dhamma take this definition for granted, but if you consider the matter deeply, how the human mind gets so caught up in sights, sounds, smells, tastes, feelings, and mental states, you might see that really there isn't anything which is not mind-

attended. As long as there is craving in the mind everything becomes mind-attended.

Studying the Dhamma without practising it, we will be unaware of its deeper meanings. For instance, we might think that the pillars of this meeting hall, the tables, benches and all inanimate things are 'not mind-attended'. We only look at one side of things. But just try getting a hammer and smashing some of these things and you'll see whether they're mind-attended or not!

It's our own mind, clinging to the tables, chairs and all of our possessions, which attends these things. Even when one little cup breaks it hurts, because our mind is 'attending' that cup. Whatever we feel to be ours, trees, mountains or whatever, have a mind attending them. If not their own, then someone else's. These are all 'mind-attended conditions', not 'non-mind-attended'.

It's the same for our body. Normally we would say that the body is mind-attended. The 'mind' which attends the body is none other than *upādāna*; latching onto the body and clinging to it as being 'me' and 'mine'.

Just as a blind man can not conceive of colours - no matter where he looks, no colours can be seen - just so for the mind blocked by craving and delusion; all objects of consciousness become mind-attended. For the mind tainted with craving and obstructed by delusion, everything becomes mind-attended. Tables, chairs, animals and everything else. If we understand that there is an intrinsic self, the mind attaches to everything. All of nature becomes mind-attended, there is always clinging and attachment.

The Buddha talked about *sankhata* dhammas and *asankhata* dhammas - conditioned and unconditioned things. Conditioned things are innumerable - material or immaterial, big or small. If our mind is under the influence of delusion, it will proliferate about these things, dividing them up into good and bad, short and long, coarse and refined. Why does the mind proliferate like this? Because it doesn't know determined reality (*sammuti-sacca*), it doesn't see the Dhamma. Not seeing the Dhamma, the mind is full of clinging. As long as the mind is held down by clinging, there can be no escape; there is confusion, birth, old age, sickness and death, even in the thinking processes. This kind of mind is called the *sankhata dhamma* (conditioned mind).

Asankhata dhamma, the unconditioned, refers to the mind which has seen Dhamma, the truth, of the five khandhas as they are - as transient, imperfect and ownerless. All ideas of 'me' and 'them', 'mine' and 'theirs', belong to the determined reality. Really, they are all conditions. When we know the truth of conditions, as neither ourselves nor belonging to us, we let go of conditions and the determined. When we let go of conditions we attain the Dhamma, we enter into and realize the Dhamma. When we attain the Dhamma we know

clearly. What do we know? We know that there are only conditions and determinations, no being, no self, no 'us' nor 'them'. This is knowledge of the way things are.

Seeing in this way the mind transcends things. The body may grow old, get sick and die, but the mind transcends this state. When the mind transcends conditions, it knows the unconditioned. The mind becomes the unconditioned, the state which no longer contains conditioning factors. The mind is no longer conditioned by the concerns of the world, conditions no longer contaminate the mind. Pleasure and pain no longer affect it. Nothing can affect the mind or change it, the mind is assured, it has escaped all constructions. Seeing the true nature of conditions and the determined, the mind becomes free. This freed mind is called the 'unconditioned', that which is beyond the power of constructing influences.

If the mind doesn't really know conditions and determinations, it is moved by them. Encountering good, bad, pleasure, or pain, it proliferates about them. Why does it proliferate? Because there is still a cause. What is the cause? The cause is the understanding that the body is one's self, or belongs to the self; that feelings are self or belonging to self; that perception is self or belonging to self; that conceptual thought is self or belonging to self; that consciousness is self or belonging to self. The tendency to conceive things in terms of self is the source of happiness, suffering, birth, old age, sickness and death. This is the worldly mind, spinning around and changing at the directives of worldly conditions. This is the conditioned mind.

If we receive some windfall, our mind is conditioned by it. That object influences our mind into a feeling of pleasure, but when it disappears, our mind is conditioned by it into suffering. The mind becomes a slave of conditions, a slave of desire. No matter what the world presents to it, the mind is moved accordingly. This mind has no refuge, it is not yet assured of itself, not yet free. It is still lacking a firm base. This mind doesn't yet know the truth of conditions. Such is the conditioned mind.

All of you listening to the Dhamma here, reflect for a while. Even a child can make you angry, isn't that so? Even a child can trick you. He could trick you into crying, laughing - he could trick you into all sorts of things. Even old people get duped by these things. The mind of a deluded person who doesn't know the truth of conditions is always being shaped into countless reactions, such as love, hate, pleasure and pain. They shape our minds like this because we are enslaved by them. We are slaves of *tanhā*, craving. Craving gives all the orders, and we simply obey.

I hear people complaining, 'Oh, I'm so miserable. Night and day I have to go to the fields, I have no time at home. In the middle of the day I have to work

in the hot sun with no shade. No matter how cold it is I can't stay at home, I have to go to work. I'm so oppressed.'

If I ask them, 'Why don't you just leave home and become a monk?' they say, 'I can't leave, I have responsibilities.' *Tanhā* pulls them back. Sometimes when you're doing the ploughing you might be bursting to urinate so much you just have to do it while you're ploughing, like the buffaloes! This is how much craving enslaves them.

When I ask, 'How are you going? Haven't you got time to come to the monastery?' they say, 'Oh, I'm really in deep.' I don't know what it is they're stuck in so deeply! These are just conditions, concoctions. The Buddha taught to see appearances as such, to see conditions as they are. This is seeing the Dhamma, seeing things as they really are. If you really see these two things, you must throw them out, let them go.

No matter what you may receive, it has no real substance. At first it may seem good, but it will eventually go bad. It will make you love and make you hate, make you laugh and cry, make you go whichever way it pulls you. Why is this? Because the mind is undeveloped. Conditions become conditioning factors of the mind, making it big and small, happy and sad.

In the time of our forefathers, when a person died they would invite the monks to go and recite the recollections on impermanence:

Aniccā vata sankhārā
Impermanent are all conditioned things

Uppāda-vaya-dhammino
Of the nature to arise and pass away

Uppajjitvā nirujjhanti
Having been born, they all must perish

Tesam vūpasamo sukho.
The cessation of conditions is true happiness.

All conditions are impermanent. The body and the mind are both impermanent. They are impermanent because they do not remain fixed and unchanging. All things that are born must necessarily change, they are transient - especially our body. What is there that doesn't change within this body? Are hair, nails, teeth, skin still the same as they used to be? The condition of the body is constantly changing, so it is impermanent. Is the body stable? Is the mind stable? Think about it. How many times is there arising and ceasing even in one day? Both body and mind are constantly arising and

ceasing, conditions are in a state of constant turmoil.

The reason you can't see these things in line with the truth is because you keep believing the untrue. It's like being guided by a blind man. How can you travel in safety? A blind man will only lead you into forests and thickets. How could he lead you to safety when he can't see? In the same way our mind is deluded by conditions, creating suffering in the search for happiness, creating difficulty in the search for ease. Such a mind only makes for difficulty and suffering. Really we want to get rid of suffering and difficulty, but instead we create those very things. All we can do is complain. We create bad causes, and the reason we do is because we don't know the truth of appearances and conditions.

Conditions are impermanent, both the mind-attended and the non-mind-attended ones. In practice, the non-mind-attended conditions are non-existent. What is there that is not mind-attended? Even your own toilet, which you would think would be non-mind-attended; try letting someone smash it with a sledge hammer! He would probably have to contend with the 'authorities'. The mind attends everything, even faeces and urine. Except for the person who sees clearly the way things are, there are no such things as non-mind-attended conditions.

Appearances are determined into existence. Why must we determine them? Because they don't intrinsically exist. For example, suppose somebody wanted to make a marker. He would take a piece of wood or a rock and place it on the ground, and then call it a marker. Actually it's not a marker. There isn't any marker, that's why you must determine it into existence. In the same way we 'determine' cities, people, cattle - everything! Why must we determine these things? Because originally they do not exist.

Concepts such as 'monk' and 'layperson' are also 'determinations'. We determine these things into existence because intrinsically they aren't here. It's like having an empty dish - you can put anything you like into it because it's empty. This is the nature of determined reality. Men and women are simply determined concepts, as are all the things around us.

If we know the truth of determinations clearly, we will know that there are no beings, because 'beings' are determined things. Understanding that these things are simply determinations, you can be at peace. But if you believe that the person, being, the 'mine', the 'theirs', and so on are intrinsic qualities, then you must laugh and cry over them. These are the proliferations of conditioning factors. If we take such things to be ours there will always be suffering. This is *micchāditthi*, wrong view. Names are not intrinsic realities, they are provisional truths. Only after we are born do we obtain names, isn't that so? Or did you have your name already when you were born? The name

usually comes afterwards, right? Why must we determine these names? Because intrinsically they aren't there.

We should clearly understand these determinations. Good, evil, high, low, black and white are all determinations. We are all lost in determinations. This is why at the funeral ceremonies the monks chant, *Aniccā vata sankhārā ...* Conditions are impermanent, they arise and pass away. That's the truth. What is there that, having arisen, doesn't cease? Good moods arise and then cease. Have you ever seen anybody cry for three or four years? At the most, you may see people crying a whole night, and then the tears dry up. Having arisen, they cease.

Tesam vūpasamo sukho: If we understand *sankhāras* (proliferations), and thereby subdue them, this is the greatest happiness. To be calmed of proliferations, calmed of 'being', calmed of individuality, of the burden of self, is true merit. Transcending these things one sees the unconditioned. This means that no matter what happens, the mind doesn't proliferate around it. There's nothing that can throw the mind off its natural balance. What else could you want? This is the end, the finish.

The Buddha taught the way things are. Our making offerings and listening to Dhamma talks and so on is in order to search for and realize this. If we realize this, we don't have to go and study vipassanā, it will happen of itself. Both samatha and vipassanā are determined into being, just like other determinations. The mind which knows, which is beyond such things, is the culmination of the practice.

Our practice, our inquiry, is in order to transcend suffering. When clinging is finished with, states of being are finished with. When states of being are finished with, there is no more birth or death. When things are going well, the mind does not rejoice, and when things are going badly, the mind does not grieve. The mind is not dragged all over the place by the tribulations of the world, and so the practice is finished. This is the basic principle for which the Buddha gave the teaching.

The Buddha taught the Dhamma for use in our lives. Even when we die there is the teaching *Tesam vūpasamo sukho*. But we don't subdue these conditions, we only carry them around, as if the monks were telling us to do so. We carry them around and cry over them. This is getting lost in conditions. Heaven, hell and Nibbāna are all to be found at this point.

Practising the Dhamma is in order to transcend suffering in the mind. If we know the truth of things as I've explained here, we will automatically know the Four Noble Truths - suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the way leading to the cessation of suffering.

People are generally ignorant when it comes to determinations, they think they all exist of themselves. When the books tell us that trees, mountains and rivers are non-mind-attended conditions, this is simplifying things. This is just the superficial teaching, there's no reference to suffering, as if there was no suffering in the world. This is just the shell of Dhamma. If we were to explain things in terms of ultimate truth, we would see that it's people who go and tie all these things down with their attachments. How can you say that things have no power to shape events, that they are not mind-attended, when people will beat their children even over one tiny needle? One single plate or cup, a plank of wood - the mind attends all these things. Just watch what happens if someone goes and smashes one of them up and you'll find out. Everything is capable of influencing us in this way. Knowing these things fully is our practice, examining those things which are conditioned, unconditioned, mind-attended, and non-mind-attended.

This is part of the 'external teaching', as the Buddha once referred to them. At one time the Buddha was staying in a forest. Taking a handful of leaves, He asked the bhikkhus, 'Bhikkhus, which is the greater number, the leaves I hold in my hand or the leaves scattered over the forest floor?'

The bhikkhus answered, 'The leaves in the Blessed One's hand are few, the leaves scattered around the forest floor are by far the greater number.'

'In the same way, bhikkhus, the whole of the Buddha's teaching is vast, but these are not the essence of things, they are not directly related to the way out of suffering. There are so many aspects to the teaching, but what the Tathāgata really wants you to do is to transcend suffering, to inquire into things and abandon clinging and attachment to form, feeling, perception, volition and consciousness.¹ Stop clinging to these things and you will transcend suffering. These teachings are like the leaves in the Buddha's hand. You don't need so much, just a little is enough. As for the rest of the teaching, you needn't worry yourselves over it. It is just like the vast earth, abundant with grasses, soil, mountains, forests. There's no shortage of rocks and pebbles, but all those rocks are not as valuable as one single jewel. The Dhamma of the Buddha is like this, you don't need a lot.

So whether you are talking about the Dhamma or listening to it, you should know the Dhamma. You needn't wonder where the Dhamma is, it's right here. No matter where you go to study the Dhamma, it is really in the mind. The mind is the one who clings, the mind is the one who speculates, the mind is the one who transcends, who lets go. All this external study is really about the mind. No matter if you study the tipitaka, the *Abhidhamma* or whatever, don't forget where it came from.

When it comes to the practice, the only things you really need to make a start are honesty and integrity, you don't need to make a lot of trouble for yourself. None of you laypeople have studied the *Tipi.taka*, but you are still capable of greed, anger and delusion, aren't you? Where did you learn about these things from? Did you have to read the *Tipi.taka* or the *Abhidhamma* to have greed, hatred and delusion? Those things are already there in your mind, you don't have to study books to have them. But the teachings are for inquiring into and abandoning these things.

Let the knowing spread from within you and you will be practising rightly. If you want to see a train, just go to the central station, you don't have to go travelling all the way up the Northern Line, the Southern Line, the Eastern Line and the Western Line to see all the trains. If you want to see trains, every single one of them, you'd be better off waiting at Grand Central Station, that's where they all terminate.

Now some people tell me, 'I want to practise but I don't know how. I'm not up to studying the scriptures, I'm getting old now, my memory's not good.' Just look right here, at 'Central Station'. Greed arises here, anger arises here, delusion arises here. Just sit here and you can watch as all these things arise. Practise right here, because right here is where you're stuck. Right here is where the determined arises, where conventions arise, and right here is where the Dhamma will arise.

Therefore, the practice of Dhamma doesn't distinguish between class or race, all it asks is that we look into, see and understand. At first, we train the body and speech to be free of taints, which is *sīla*. Some people think that to have *sīla* you must memorize Pāli phrases and chant all day and all night, but really all you have to do is make your body and speech blameless, and that's *sīla*. It's not so difficult to understand, just like cooking food; put in a little bit of this and a little bit of that, till it's just right and it's delicious! You don't have to add anything else to make it delicious, it's delicious already, if only you add the right ingredients. In the same way, taking care that our actions and speech are proper will give us *sīla*.

Dhamma practice can be done anywhere. In the past I travelled all over looking for a teacher because I didn't know how to practise. I was always afraid that I was practising wrongly. I'd be constantly going from one mountain to another, from one place to another, until I stopped and reflected on it. Now I understand. In the past I must have been quite stupid, I went all over the place looking for places to practise meditation - I didn't realize it was already there, in my heart. All the meditation you want is right there inside you. There is birth, old age, sickness and death right here within you. That's why the Buddha said *Paccattam veditabbo viññūhi*: the wise must know for

themselves. I'd said the words before but I still didn't know their meaning. I travelled all over looking for it until I was ready to drop dead from exhaustion - only then, when I stopped, did I find what I was looking for, inside of me. So now I can tell you about it.

So in your practice of sīla, just practise as I've explained here. Don't doubt the practice. Even though some people may say you can't practise at home, that there are too many obstacles; if that's the case, then even eating and drinking are going to be obstacles. If these things are obstacles to practise, then don't eat! If you stand on a thorn, is that good? Isn't not standing on a thorn better? Dhamma practice brings benefit to all people, irrespective of class. However much you practise, that's how much you will know the truth.

Some people say they can't practise as a lay person, the environment is too crowded. If you live in a crowded place, then look into crowdedness, make it open and wide. The mind has been deluded by crowdedness, train it to know the truth of crowdedness. The more you neglect the practice, the more you neglect going to the monastery and listening to the teaching, the more your mind will sink down into the bog, like a frog going into a hole. Someone comes along with a hook and the frog's done for, he doesn't have a chance. All he can do is stretch out his neck and offer it to them. So watch out that you don't work yourself into a tiny corner - someone may just come along with a hook and scoop you up. At home, being pestered by your children and grandchildren, you are even worse off than the frog! You don't know how to detach from these things. When old age, sickness and death come along, what will you do? This is the hook that's going to get you. Which way will you turn?

This is the predicament our minds are in. Engrossed in the children, the relatives, the possessions, and you don't know how to let them go. Without morality or understanding to free things up, there is no way out for you. When feeling, perception, volition and consciousness produce suffering you always get caught up in it. Why is there this suffering? If you don't investigate you won't know. If happiness arises, you simply get caught up in happiness, delighting in it. You don't ask yourself, 'Where does this happiness come from?'

So change your understanding. You can practise anywhere because the mind is with you everywhere. If you think good thoughts while sitting, you can be aware of them; if you think bad thoughts, you can be aware of them also. These things are with you. While lying down, if you think good thoughts or bad thoughts, you can know them also, because the place to practise is in the mind. Some people think you have to go to the monastery every single day. That's not necessary, just look at your own mind. If you know where the

practice is you'll be assured.

The Buddha's teaching tells us to watch ourselves, not to run after fads and superstitions. That's why he said,

Sīlena sugatim yanti

Moral rectitude leads to well-being

Sīlena bhogasampadā

Moral rectitude leads to wealth

Sīlena nibbutim yanti

Moral rectitude leads to Nibbāna

Tasmā sīlam visodhaye

Therefore, maintain your precepts purely

Sīla refers to our actions. Good actions bring good results, bad actions bring bad results. Don't expect the gods to do things for you, or the angels and guardian deities to protect you, or the auspicious days to help you. These things aren't true, don't believe in them. If you believe in them, you will suffer. You'll always be waiting for the right day, the right month, the right year, the angels and guardian deities ... you'll suffer that way. Look into your own actions and speech, into your own kamma. Doing good you inherit goodness, doing bad you inherit badness.

If you understand that good and bad, right and wrong all lie within you, then you won't have to go looking for those things somewhere else. Just look for these things where they arise. If you lose something here, you must look for it here. Even if you don't find it at first, keep looking where you dropped it. But usually, we lose it here then go looking over there. When will you ever find it? Good and bad actions lie within you. One day you're bound to see it, just keep looking right there.

All beings fare according to their kamma. What is kamma? People are too gullible. If you do bad actions, they say Yāma, the king of the underworld, will write it all down in a book. When you go there he takes out his accounts and looks you up. You're all afraid of the Yāma in the after-life, but you don't know the Yāma within your own minds. If you do bad actions, even if you sneak off and do it by yourself, this Yāma will write it all down. There are probably many among you people sitting here who have secretly done bad things, not letting anyone else see. But you see it, don't you? This Yāma sees it all. Can you see it for yourself? All of you, think for a while ... Yāma has written it all down, hasn't he? There's no way you can escape it. Whether you do it alone or in a group, in a field or wherever.

Is there anybody here who has ever stolen something? There are probably a few of us who are ex-thieves. Even if you don't steal other people's things you still may steal your own. I myself have that tendency, that's why I reckon some of you may be the same. Maybe you have secretly done bad things in the past, not letting anyone else know about it. But even if you don't tell anyone else about it, you must know about it. This is the Yāma who watches over you and writes it all down. Wherever you go he writes it all down in his account book. We know our own intention. When you do bad actions, badness is there, if you do good actions, goodness is there. There's nowhere you can go to hide. Even if others don't see you, you must see yourself. Even if you go into a deep hole you'll still find yourself there. There's no way you can commit bad actions and get away with it. In the same way, why shouldn't you see your own purity? See it all - the peaceful, the agitated, the liberation or the bondage - see all these for yourselves.

In this Buddhist religion you must be aware of all your actions. We don't act like the Brāhmans, who go into your house and say, 'May you be well and strong, may you live long.' The Buddha doesn't talk like that. How will the disease go away with just talk? The Buddha's way of treating the sick was to say, 'Before you were sick what happened? What led up to your sickness?' Then you tell him how it came about. 'Oh, it's like that, is it? Take this medicine and try it out.' If it's not the right medicine he tries another one. If it's right for the illness, then that's the right one. This way is scientifically sound. As for the Brāhmans, they just tie a string around your wrist and say, 'Okay, be well, be strong, when I leave this place you just get right on up and eat a hearty meal and be well.' No matter how much you pay them, your illness won't go away, because their way has no scientific basis. But this is what people like to believe.

The Buddha didn't want us to put too much store in these things, he wanted us to practise with reason. Buddhism has been around for thousands of years now, and most people have continued to practise as their teachers have taught them, regardless of whether it's right or wrong. That's stupid. They simply follow the example of their forebears.

The Buddha didn't encourage this sort of thing. He wanted us to do things with reason. For example, at one time when he was teaching the monks, he asked Venerable Sāriputta, 'Sāriputta, do you believe this teaching?' Venerable Sāriputta replied, 'I don't yet believe it.' The Buddha praised his answer: 'Very good, Sāriputta. A wise person doesn't believe too readily. He looks into things, into their causes and conditions, and sees their true nature before believing or disbelieving.'

But most teachers these days would say, 'What?! You don't believe me? Get

out of here!' Most people are afraid of their teachers. Whatever their teachers do they just blindly follow. The Buddha taught to adhere to the truth. Listen to the teaching and then consider it intelligently, inquire into it. It's the same with my Dhamma talks - go and consider it. Is what I say right? Really look into it, look within yourself.

So it is said to guard your mind. Whoever guards his mind will free himself from the shackles of Māra. It's just this mind which goes and grabs onto things, knows things, sees things, experiences happiness and suffering - just this very mind. When we fully know the truth of determinations and conditions, we will naturally throw off suffering.

All things are just as they are. They don't cause suffering in themselves, just like a thorn, a really sharp thorn. Does it make you suffer? No, it's just a thorn, it doesn't bother anybody. But if you go and stand on it, then you'll suffer. Why is there this suffering? Because you stepped on the thorn. The thorn is just minding its own business, it doesn't harm anybody. Only if you step on the thorn will you suffer over it. It's because of ourselves that there's pain. Form, feeling, perception, volition, consciousness - all things in this world are simply there as they are. It's us who pick fights with them. And if we hit them they're going to hit us back. If they're left on their own, they won't bother anybody; only the swaggering drunkard gives them trouble. All conditions fare according to their nature. That's why the Buddha said, *Tesam vūpasamo sukho*. If we subdue conditions, seeing determinations and conditions as they really are, as neither 'me' nor 'mine', 'us' nor 'them', when we see that these beliefs are simply *sakkāya-ditthi*, the conditions are freed of the self-delusion.

If you think 'I'm good', 'I'm bad', 'I'm great', 'I'm the best', then you are thinking wrongly. If you see all these thoughts as merely determinations and conditions, then when others say 'good' or 'bad' you can leave it be with them. As long as you still see it as 'me' and 'you' it's like having three hornets nests - as soon as you say something the hornets come buzzing out to sting you. The three hornets nests are *sakkāya-ditthi*, *vicikicchā*, and *sīlabbata-parāmāsa*.²

Once you look into the true nature of determinations and conditions, pride can not prevail. Other people's fathers are just like our father, their mothers are just like ours, their children are just like ours. We see the happiness and suffering of other beings as just like ours.

If we see in this way, we can come face to face with the future Buddha, it's not so difficult. Everyone is in the same boat. Then the world will be as smooth as a drum skin. If you want to wait around to meet Pra Sri Ariya

Metteyya, the future Buddha, then just don't practise; you'll probably be around long enough to see him. But he's not crazy that he'd take people like that for disciples! Most people just doubt. If you no longer doubt about the self, then no matter what people may say about you, you aren't concerned, because your mind has let go, it is at peace. Conditions become subdued. Grasping after the forms of practice, that teacher is bad, that place is no good, this is right, that's wrong No. There's none of these things. All this kind of thinking is all smoothed over. You come face to face with the future Buddha. Those who only hold up their hands and pray will never get there.

So this is the practice. If I talked anymore it would just be more of the same. Another talk would just be the same as this. I've brought you this far, now you think about it. I've brought you to the path, whoever's going to go, it's there for you. Those who aren't going can stay. The Buddha only sees you to the beginning of the path. *Akkhātaro Tathāgatā* - the *Tathāgata* only points the way. For my practice he only taught this much. The rest was up to me. Now I teach you, I can tell you just this much. I can bring you only to the beginning of the path, whoever wants to go back can go back, whoever wants to travel on can travel on. It's up to you, now.

¹: The five khandhas.

²: Self-view, doubt, and attachment to rites and practices.

Clarity of Insight

Meditate reciting '*Buddho, Buddho*' until it penetrates deep into the heart of your consciousness (*citta*). The word *Buddho* represents the awareness and wisdom of the Buddha. In practice, you must depend on this word more than anything else. The awareness it brings will lead you to understand the truth about your own mind. It's a true refuge, which means that there is both mindfulness and insight present.

Wild animals can have awareness of a sort. They have mindfulness as they stalk their prey and prepare to attack. Even the predator needs firm mindfulness to keep hold of the captured prey however defiantly it struggles to escape death. That is one kind of mindfulness. For this reason you must be able to distinguish between different kinds of mindfulness. The Buddha taught to meditate reciting *Buddho* as a way to apply the mind. When you consciously apply the mind to an object, it wakes up. The awareness wakes it up. Once this knowing has arisen through meditation, you can see the mind clearly. As long as the mind remains without the awareness of *Buddho*, even if there is ordinary worldly mindfulness present, the mind is unawakened and without insight. It will not lead you to what is truly beneficial.

Sati or mindfulness depends on the presence of *Buddho* - the knowing. It must be a clear knowing, which leads to the mind becoming brighter and more radiant. The illuminating effect that this clear knowing has on the mind is similar to the brightening of a light in a darkened room. As long as the room is pitch black, any objects placed inside remain difficult to distinguish or else completely obscured from view because of the lack of light. But as you begin intensifying the brightness of the light inside, it will penetrate throughout the whole room, enabling you to see more clearly from moment to moment, thus allowing you to know more and more the details of any object inside there.

You could also compare training the mind with teaching a child. It would be impossible to force children who still hadn't learnt to speak, to accumulate knowledge at an unnaturally fast rate that is beyond their capability. You can't get too tough with them or try teaching them more language than they can take in at any one time, because the children would simply be unable to hold their attention long enough on what you were saying.

Your mind is similar. Sometimes it's appropriate to give yourself some praise and encouragement; sometimes it's more appropriate to be critical. It's like with children: if you scold them too often and are too intense in the way you deal with this, they won't progress in the right way, even though they might be determined to do well. If you force them too much, the child will be adversely affected, because they still lack knowledge and experience and as a

result will naturally lose track of the right way to go. If you do that with your own mind, it isn't *sammā patipadā* or the way of practice that leads to enlightenment. *Patipadā* or practice refers to the training and guidance of body, speech and mind. Here I am specifically referring to the training of the mind.

The Buddha taught that training the mind involves knowing how to teach yourself and go against the grain of your desires. You have to use different skilful means to teach your mind because it constantly gets caught into moods of depression and elation. This is the nature of the unenlightened mind - it's just like a child. The parents of a child who hasn't learnt to speak are in a position to teach it because they know how to speak and their knowledge of the language is greater. The parents are constantly in a position to see where their child is lacking in its understanding, because they know more. Training the mind is like this. When you have the awareness of *Buddho*, the mind is wiser and has a more refined level of knowing than normal. This awareness allows you to see the conditions of the mind and to see the mind itself; you can see the state of mind in the midst of all phenomena. This being so, you are naturally able to employ skilful techniques for training the mind. Whether you are caught into doubt or any other of the defilements, you see it as a mental phenomenon that arises in the mind and must be investigated and dealt with in the mind.

That awareness which we call *Buddho* is like the parents of the child. The parents are the children's teachers in charge of its training, so it's quite natural that whenever they allow it to wander freely, simultaneously they must keep one eye on it, aware of what it's doing and where it's running or crawling to.

Sometimes you can be too clever and have too many good ideas. In the case of teaching children, you might think so much about what is best for them, that you could reach the point where the more methods you think up for teaching them, the further away they move from the goals you want them to achieve. The more you try and teach them, the more distant they become, until they actually start to go astray and fail to develop in the proper way.

In training the mind, it is crucial to overcome sceptical doubt. Doubt and uncertainty are powerful obstacles that must be dealt with. Investigation of the three fetters of personality view (*sakkāya-ditthi*), blind attachment to rules and practices (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*) and sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā*) is the way out of attachment practised by the Noble Ones (*ariyapuggalā*). But at first you just understand these defilements from the books - you still lack insight into how things truly are. Investigating personality view is the way to go beyond the delusion that identifies the body as a self. This includes attachment to your own body as a self or attaching to other people's bodies as

solid selves. *Sakkāya-ditthi* or personality view refers to this thing you call yourself. It means attachment to the view that the body is a self. You must investigate this view until you gain a new understanding and can see the truth that attachment to the body is defilement and it obstructs the minds of all human beings from gaining insight into the Dhamma.

For this reason, before anything else the preceptor will instruct each new candidate for bhikkhu ordination to investigate the five meditation objects: hair of the head (*kesā*), hair of the body (*lomā*), nails (*nakhā*), teeth (*dantā*) and skin (*taco*). It is through contemplation and investigation that you develop insight into personality view. These objects form the most immediate basis for the attachment that creates the delusion of personality view.

Contemplating them leads to the direct examination of personality view and provides the means by which each generation of men and women who take up the instructions of the preceptor upon entering the community can actually transcend personality view. But in the beginning you remain deluded, without insight and hence are unable to penetrate personality view and see the truth of the way things are. You fail to see the truth because you still have a firm and unyielding attachment. It's this attachment that sustains the delusion.

The Buddha taught to transcend delusion. The way to transcend it is through clearly seeing the body for what it is. With penetrating insight you must see that the true nature of both your own body and other people's is essentially the same. There is no fundamental difference between people's bodies. The body is just the body; it's not a being, a self, yours or theirs. This clear insight into the true nature of the body is called *kāyānupassanā*. A body exists; you label it and give it a name. Then you attach and cling to it with the view that it is your body or his or her body. You attach to the view that the body is permanent and that it is something clean and pleasant. This attachment goes deep into the mind. This is the way that the mind clings to the body.

Personality view means that you are still caught in doubt and uncertainty about the body. Your insight hasn't fully penetrated the delusion that sees the body as a self. As long as the delusion remains, you call the body a self or *attā* and interpret your entire experience from the viewpoint that there is a solid, enduring entity which you call the self. You are so completely attached to the conventional way of viewing the body as a self, that there is no apparent way of seeing beyond it. But clear understanding according to the truth of the way things are means you see the body as just that much: the body is just the body. With insight, you see the body as just that much and this wisdom counteracts the delusion of the sense of self. This insight that sees the body as just that much, leads to the destruction of attachment (*upādāna*) through the gradual uprooting and letting go of delusion.

Practise contemplating the body as being just that much, until it is quite natural to think to yourself: ‘Oh, the body is merely the body. It’s just that much.’ Once this way of reflection is established, as soon as you say to yourself that it’s just that much, the mind lets go. There is letting go of attachment to the body. There is the insight that sees the body as merely the body. By sustaining this sense of detachment through continuous seeing of the body as merely the body, all doubt and uncertainty are gradually uprooted. As you investigate the body, the more clearly you see it as just the body rather than a person, a being, a me or a them, the more powerful the effect on the mind, resulting in the simultaneous removal of doubt and uncertainty. Blind attachment to rules and practices (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*), which manifests in the mind as blindly fumbling and feeling around through lack of clarity as to the real purpose of practice, is abandoned simultaneously because it arises in conjunction with personality view.

You could say that the three fetters of doubt, blind attachment to rites and practices and personality view are inseparable and even similes for each other. Once you have seen this relationship clearly, when one of the three fetters, such as doubt for instance, arises and you are able to let it go through the cultivation of insight, the other two fetters are automatically abandoned at the same time. They are extinguished together. Simultaneously, you let go of personality view and the blind attachment that is the cause of fumbling and fuzziness of intention over different practices. You see them each as one part of your overall attachment to the sense of self, which is to be abandoned. You must repeatedly investigate the body and break it down into its component parts. As you see each part as it truly is, the perception of the body being a solid entity or self is gradually eroded away. You have to keep putting continuous effort into this investigation of the truth and can’t let up.

A further aspect of mental development that leads to clearer and deeper insight is meditating on an object to calm the mind down. The calm mind is the mind that is firm and stable in *samādhi*. This can be *khanika samādhi* (momentary concentration), *upacāra-samādhi* (neighbourhood concentration) or *appanā samādhi* (absorption). The level of concentration is determined by the refinement of consciousness from moment to moment as you train the mind to maintain awareness on a meditation object.

In *khanika samādhi* (momentary concentration) the mind unifies for just a short space of time. It calms down in *samādhi*, but having gathered together momentarily, immediately withdraws from that peaceful state. As concentration becomes more refined in the course of meditation, many similar characteristics of the tranquil mind are experienced at each level, so each one is described as a level of *samādhi*, whether it is *khanika*, *upacāra* or *appanā*.

At each level the mind is calm, but the depth of the samādhi varies and the nature of the peaceful mental state experienced differs. On one level the mind is still subject to movement and can wander, but moves around within the confines of the concentrated state. It doesn't get caught in activity that leads to agitation and distraction. Your awareness might follow a wholesome mental object for a while, before returning to settle down at a point of stillness where it remains for a period.

You could compare the experience of *khanika samādhi* with a physical activity like taking a walk somewhere: you might walk for a period before stopping for a rest, and having rested start walking again until it's time to stop for another rest. Even though you interrupt the journey periodically to stop walking and take rests, each time remaining completely still, it is only ever a temporary stillness of the body. After a short space of time you have to start moving again to continue the journey. This is what happens within the mind as it experiences such a level of concentration.

If you practise meditation focusing on an object to calm the mind and reach a level of calm where the mind is firm in samādhi, but there is still some mental movement occurring, that is known as *upacāra-samādhi*. In *upacāra-samādhi* the mind can still move around. This movement takes place within certain limits, the mind doesn't move beyond them. The boundaries within which the mind can move are determined by the firmness and stability of concentration. The experience is as if you alternate between a state of calm and a certain amount of mental activity. The mind is calm some of the time and active for the rest. Within that activity there is still a certain level of calm and concentration that persists, but the mind is not completely still or immovable. It is still thinking a little and wandering about. It's like you are wandering around inside your own home. You wander around within the limits of your concentration, without losing awareness and moving outdoors away from the meditation object. The movement of the mind stays within the bounds of wholesome (*kusala*) mental states. It doesn't get caught into any mental proliferation based on unwholesome (*akusala*) mental states. Any thinking remains wholesome. Once the mind is calm, it necessarily experiences wholesome mental states from moment to moment. During the time it is concentrated the mind only experiences wholesome mental states and periodically settles down to become completely still and one-pointed on its object.

So the mind still experiences some movement, circling around its object. It can still wander. It might wander around within the confines set by the level of concentration, but no real harm arises from this movement because the mind is calm in samādhi. This is how the development of the mind proceeds

in the course of practice.

In *appanā samādhi* the mind calms down and is stilled to a level where it is at its most subtle and skilful. Even if you experience sense impingement from the outside, such as sounds and physical sensations, it remains external and is unable to disturb the mind. You might hear a sound, but it won't distract your concentration. There is the hearing of the sound, but the experience is as if you don't hear anything. There is awareness of the impingement but it's as if you are not aware. This is because you let go. The mind lets go automatically. Concentration is so deep and firm that you let go of attachment to sense impingement quite naturally. The mind can absorb into this state for long periods. Having stayed inside for an appropriate amount of time, it then withdraws. Sometimes, as you withdraw from such a deep level of concentration, a mental image of some aspect of your own body can appear. It might be a mental image displaying an aspect of the unattractive nature of your body that arises into consciousness. As the mind withdraws from the refined state, the image of the body appears to emerge and expand from within the mind. Any aspect of the body could come up as a mental image and fill up the mind's eye at that point.

Images that come up in this way are extremely clear and unmistakable. You have to have genuinely experienced very deep tranquillity for them to arise. You see them absolutely clearly, even though your eyes are closed. If you open your eyes you can't see them, but with eyes shut and the mind absorbed in *samādhi*, you can see such images as clearly as if viewing the object with eyes wide open. You can even experience a whole train of consciousness, where from moment to moment the mind's awareness is fixed on images expressing the unattractive nature of the body. The appearance of such images in a calm mind can become the basis for insight into the impermanent nature of the body, as well as into its unattractive, unclean and unpleasant nature, or into the complete lack of any real self or essence within it.

When these kinds of special knowledge arise they provide the basis for skilful investigation and the development of insight. You bring this kind of insight right inside your heart. As you do this more and more, it becomes the cause for insight knowledge to arise by itself. Sometimes, when you turn your attention to reflecting on the subject of *asubha*, images of different unattractive aspects of the body can manifest in the mind automatically. These images are clearer than any you could try to summon up with your imagination and lead to insight of a far more penetrating nature than that gained through the ordinary kind of discursive thinking. This kind of clear insight has such a striking impact that the activity of the mind is brought to a stop followed by the experience of a deep sense of dispassion. The reason it is

so clear and piercing is that it originates from a completely peaceful mind. Investigating from within a state of calm, leads you to clearer and clearer insight, the mind becoming more peaceful as it is increasingly absorbed in the contemplation. The clearer and more conclusive the insight, the deeper inside the mind penetrates with its investigation, constantly supported by the calm of samādhi. This is what the practice of *kammatthāna*: involves. Continuous investigation in this way helps you to repeatedly let go of and ultimately destroy attachment to personality view. It brings an end to all remaining doubt and uncertainty about this heap of flesh we call the body and the letting go of blind attachment to rules and practices.

Even in the event of serious illness, tropical fevers or different health problems that normally have a strong physical impact and shake the body up, your samādhi and insight remains firm and imperturbable. Your understanding and insight allows you to make a clear distinction between mind and body - the mind is one phenomenon, the body another. Once you see body and mind as completely and indisputably separate from each other, it means that the practice of insight has brought you to the point where your mind sees for certain the true nature of the body.

Seeing the way the body truly is, clearly and beyond doubt from within the calm of samādhi, leads to the mind experiencing a strong sense of weariness and turning away (*nibbidā*). This turning away comes from the sense of disenchantment and dispassion that arises as the natural result of seeing the way things are. It's not a turning away that comes from ordinary worldly moods such as fear, revulsion or other unwholesome qualities like envy or aversion. It's not coming from the same root of attachment as those defiled mental states. This is turning away that has a spiritual quality to it and has a different effect on the mind from that of the normal moods of boredom and weariness experienced by ordinary unenlightened human beings (*puthujjana*). Usually when ordinary unenlightened human beings are weary and fed up, they get caught into moods of aversion, rejection and seeking to avoid. The experience of insight is not the same.

The sense of world-weariness that grows with insight, however, leads to detachment, turning away and aloofness that comes naturally from investigating and seeing the truth of the way things are. It is free from attachment to a sense of self that attempts to control and force things to go according to its desires. Rather, you let go with an acceptance of the way things are. The clarity of insight is so strong that you no longer experience any sense of a self that has to struggle against the flow of its desires or endure through attachment. The three fetters of personality view, doubt and blind attachment to rules and practices that are normally present underlying the way

you view the world can't delude you or cause you to make any serious mistakes in practice. This is the very beginning of the path, the first clear insight into ultimate truth, and paves the way for further insight. You could describe it as penetrating the Four Noble Truths.

The Four Noble Truths are things to be realized through insight. Every monk and nun, who has ever realized them, has experienced such insight into the truth of the way things are. You know suffering, you know the cause of suffering, you know the cessation of suffering and you know the path leading to the cessation of suffering. Understanding of each Noble Truth emerges at the same place within the mind. They come together and harmonize as the factors of the Noble Eightfold Path; and the Buddha taught that they are to be realized within the mind. As the path factors converge in the centre of the mind, they cut through any doubts and uncertainty you still have concerning the way of practice.

During the course of practising, it is normal that you experience the different conditions of the mind. You constantly experience desires to do this and that or to go different places, as well as the different moods of mental pain, frustration or else indulgence in pleasure seeking - all of which are the fruits of past kamma. All this resultant kamma swells up inside the mind and puffs it out. However, it is the product of past actions. Knowing that it is all stuff coming up from the past, you don't allow yourself to make anything new or extra out of it. You observe and reflect on the arising and cessation of conditions. That which has not yet arisen is still unarisen. This word 'arise' refers to *upādāna* or the mind's firm attachment and clinging. Over time your mind has been exposed to and conditioned by craving and defilement, and the mental conditions and characteristics you experience reflect that. Having developed insight, your mind no longer follows those old habit patterns that were fashioned by defilement. A separation occurs between the mind and those defiled ways of thinking and reacting. The mind separates from the defilements.

You can compare this with the effect of putting oil and water together in a bottle. Each liquid has a very different density so it doesn't matter whether you keep them in the same bottle or in separate ones, because the difference in their density prevents the liquids from mixing together or permeating into each other. The oil doesn't mix with the water and vice versa. They remain in separate parts of the bottle. You can compare the bottle with the world, and these two different liquids in the bottle, that have been put there are forced to stay within its confines are similar to you living in the world with insight that separates your mind from the defilements. You can say that you are living in the world and following the conventions of the world, but without attaching to

it. When you have to go somewhere you say you are going, when you are coming you say you are coming or whatever you are doing you use the conventions and language of the world, but it's like the two liquids in the bottle - they are in the same bottle but don't mix together. You live in the world, but at the same time you remain separate from it. The Buddha knew the truth for himself. He was the *lokavidū* - the knower of the world.

What are the sense bases (*āyatana*)? They consist of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. The ears hear sound; the nose performs the function of smelling different smells, whether fragrant or pungent; the tongue has the function of tasting tastes whether sweet, sour, rich or salty; the body senses heat and cold, softness and hardness; the mind receives mind objects which arise in the same way as they always have. The sense bases function just as they did before. You experience sensory impingement in just the same way as you always have. It's not true that after the experience of insight your nose no longer experiences any smells, or your tongue that formerly was able to taste can no longer taste anything, or the body is unable to feel anything anymore.

Your ability to experience the world through the senses remains intact, just the same as before you started practising insight, but the mind's reaction to sense impingement is to see it as 'just that much'. The mind doesn't attach to fixed perceptions or make anything out of the experience of sense objects. It lets go. The mind knows that it is letting go. As you gain insight into the true nature of the Dhamma, it naturally results in letting go. There is awareness followed by abandoning of attachment. There is understanding and then letting go. With insight you set things down. Insight knowledge doesn't lead to clinging or attachment; it doesn't increase your suffering. That's not what happens. True insight into the Dhamma results in letting go. You know that attachment is the cause of suffering, so you abandon it. Once you have insight the mind lets go. It puts down what it was formerly holding on to.

Another way to describe this is to say that you are no longer fumbling or groping around in your practice. You are no longer blindly groping and attaching to forms, sounds, smells, tastes, bodily sensations or mind objects. The experience of sense objects through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind no longer stimulates the same old habitual movements of mind where it is seeking to get involved with such sense objects or adding on to the experience through further proliferation. The mind doesn't create things around sense contact. Once contact has occurred you automatically let go. The mind discards the experience. This means that if you are attracted to something, you experience the attraction in the mind but you don't attach or hold on fast to it. If you have a reaction of aversion, there is simply the experience of aversion arising in the mind and nothing more: there isn't any

sense of self arising that attaches and gives meaning and importance to the aversion. In other words the mind knows how to let go; it knows how to set things aside. Why is it able to let go and put things down? Because the presence of insight means you can see the harmful results that come from attaching to all those mental states.

When you see forms the mind remains undisturbed; when you hear sounds it remains undisturbed. The mind doesn't take a position for or against any sense objects experienced. This is the same for all sense contact, whether it is through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body or mind. Whatever thoughts arise in the mind can't disturb you. You are able to let go. You may perceive something as desirable, but you don't attach to that perception or give it any special importance - it simply becomes a condition of mind to be observed without attachment. This is what the Buddha described as experiencing sense objects as 'just that much'. The sense bases are still functioning and experiencing sense objects, but without the process of attachment stimulating movements to and fro in the mind. There is no conditioning of the mind occurring in the sense of a self moving from this place to that place or from that place moving to this place. Sense contact occurs between the six sense bases as normal, but the mind doesn't *take sides* by getting caught in conditions of attraction or aversion. You understand how to let go. There is awareness of sense contact followed by letting go. You let go with awareness and sustain the awareness after you have let go. This is how the process of insight works. Every angle and every aspect of the mind and its experience naturally becomes part of the practice.

This is the way the mind is affected as you train it. It becomes very obvious that the mind has changed and is not the same as usual. It no longer behaves in the way you are accustomed to. You are no longer creating a self out of your experience. For example, when you experience the death of your mother, father or anyone else who is close to you, if your mind remains firm in the practice of calm and insight and is able to reflect skilfully on what has happened, you won't create suffering for yourself out of the event. Rather than panicking or feeling shocked at the news of that person's death, there is just a sense of sadness and dispassion coming from wise reflection. You are aware of the experience and then let go. There is the knowing and then you lay it aside. You let go without generating any further suffering for yourself. This is because you know clearly what causes suffering to arise. When you do encounter suffering you are aware of that suffering. As soon as you start to experience suffering you automatically ask yourself the question: where does it come from? Suffering has its cause and that is the attachment and clinging still left in the mind. So you have to let go of the attachment. All suffering comes from a cause. Having created the cause, you abandon it. Abandon it

with wisdom. You let go of it through insight, which means wisdom. You can't let go through delusion. This is the way it is.

The investigation and development of insight into the Dhamma gives rise to this profound peace of mind. When you have gained such clear and penetrating insight, it is sustained at all times whether you are sitting meditation with your eyes closed, or even if you are doing something with your eyes open. Whatever situation you find yourself in, be it in formal meditation or not, the clarity of insight remains. When you have unwavering mindfulness of the mind within the mind, you don't forget yourself. Whether standing, walking, sitting or lying down, the awareness within makes it impossible to lose mindfulness. It's a state of awareness that prevents you forgetting yourself. Mindfulness has become so strong that it is self-sustaining to the point where it becomes natural for the mind to be that way. These are the results of training and cultivating the mind and it is here where you go beyond doubt. You have no doubts about the future; you have no doubts about the past and accordingly have no need to doubt about the present either. You still have awareness that there is such a thing as past, present and future. You are aware of the existence of time. There is the reality of the past, present and future, but you are no longer concerned or worried about it.

Why are you no longer concerned? All those things that took place in the past have already happened. The past has already passed by. All that is arising in the present is the result of causes that lay in the past. An obvious example of this is to say that if you don't feel hungry now, it's because you have already eaten at some time in the past. The lack of hunger in the present is the result of actions performed in the past. If you know your experience in the present, you can know the past. Eating a meal was the cause from the past that resulted in you feeling at ease or energetic in the present, and this provides the cause for you to be active and work in the future. So the present is providing causes that will bring results in the future. The past, present and future can thus be seen as one and the same. The Buddha called it *eko dhammo* - the unity of the Dhamma. It isn't many different things; there is just this much. When you see the present, you see the future. By understanding the present you understand the past. Past, present and future make up a chain of continuous cause and effect and hence are constantly flowing on from one to the other. There are causes from the past that produce results in the present and these are already producing causes for the future. This process of cause and result applies to practice in the same way. You experience the fruits of having trained the mind in *samādhi* and insight, and these necessarily make the mind wiser and more skilful.

The mind completely transcends doubt. You are no longer uncertain or

speculating about anything. The lack of doubt means you no longer fumble around or have to feel your way through the practice. As a result you live and act in accordance with nature. You live in the world in the most natural way. That means living in the world peacefully. You are able to find peace even in the midst of that which is unpeaceful. You are fully able to live in the world. You are able to live in the world without creating any problems. The Buddha lived in the world and was able to find true peace of mind within the world. As practitioners of the Dhamma, you must learn to do the same. Don't get lost in and attached to perceptions about things being this way or that way. Don't attach or give undue importance to any perceptions that are still deluded. Whenever the mind becomes stirred up, investigate and contemplate the cause. When you aren't making any suffering for yourself out of things, you are at ease. When there are no issues causing mental agitation, you remain equanimous. That is, you continue to practise normally with a mental equanimity maintained by the presence of mindfulness and an all-round awareness. You keep a sense of self-control and equilibrium. If any matter arises and prevails upon the mind, you immediately take hold of it for thorough investigation and contemplation. If there is clear insight at that moment, you penetrate the matter with wisdom and prevent it creating any suffering in the mind. If there is not yet clear insight, you let the matter go temporarily through the practice of samatha meditation and don't allow the mind to attach. At some point in the future, your insight will certainly be strong enough to penetrate it, because sooner or later you will develop insight powerful enough to comprehend everything that still causes attachment and suffering.

Ultimately, the mind has to make a great effort to struggle with and overcome the reactions to stimulations by every kind of sense object and mental state that you experience. It must work hard with every single object that contacts it. All the six internal sense bases and their external objects converge on the mind. By focusing awareness on the mind alone, you gain understanding and insight into the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, mind and all their objects. The mind is there already, so the important thing is to investigate right at the centre of the mind. The further you go investigating the mind itself, the clearer and more profound the insight that emerges. This is something I emphasize when teaching, because understanding this point is crucial to the practice. Normally, when you experience sense contact and receive impingement from different objects, the mind is just waiting to react with attraction or aversion. That is what happens with the unenlightened mind. It's ready to get caught into good moods because of one kind of stimulation or bad moods because of another kind.

Here you examine the mind with firm and unwavering attention. As you

experience different objects through the senses, you don't let it feed mental proliferation. You don't get caught in a lot of defiled thinking - you are already practising vipassanā and depending on insight wisdom to investigate all sense objects. The mode of vipassanā meditation is what develops wisdom. Training with the different objects of samatha meditation - whether it is the recitation of a word such as *Buddho*, *Dhammo*, *Sangho* or the practice of mindfulness with the breathing - results in the mind experiencing the calm and firmness of samādhi. In samatha meditation you focus awareness on a single object and let go of all others temporarily.

Vipassanā meditation is similar because you use the reflection 'don't believe it' as you make contact with sense objects. Practising vipassanā, you don't let any sense object delude you. You are aware of each object as soon as it converges in on the mind, whether it is experienced with the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body or mind and you use this reflection 'don't believe it' almost like a verbal meditation object to be repeated over and over again. Every object immediately becomes a source of insight. You use the mind that is firm in samādhi to investigate each object's impermanent nature. At each moment of sense contact you bring up the reflection: 'It's not certain' or 'This is impermanent.' If you are caught in delusion and believe in the object experienced you suffer, because all these dhammas (phenomena) are non-self (*anattā*). If you attach to anything that is non-self and misperceive it as self, it automatically becomes a cause for pain and distress. This is because you attach to mistaken perceptions.

Repeatedly examine the truth, over and over again until you understand clearly that all these sense objects lack any true self. They do not belong to any real self. Why, then, do you misunderstand and attach to them as being a self or belonging to a self? This is where you must put forth effort to keep reflecting on the truth. They aren't truly you. They don't belong to you. Why do you misunderstand them as being a self? None of these sense objects can be considered as you in any ultimate sense. So why do they delude you into seeing them as a self? In truth, there's no way it could possibly be like that. All sense objects are impermanent, so why do you see them as permanent? It's incredible how they delude you. The body is inherently unattractive, so how can you possibly attach to the view that it is something attractive? These ultimate truths - the unattractiveness of the body and the impermanence and lack of self in all formations - become obvious with investigation and finally you see that this thing we call the world is actually a delusion created out of these wrong views.

As you use insight meditation to investigate the three characteristics and penetrate the true nature of phenomena, it's not necessary to do anything

special. There's no need to go to extremes. Don't make it difficult for yourself. Focus your awareness directly, as if you are sitting down receiving guests who are entering into a reception room. In your reception room there is only one chair, so the different guests that come into the room to meet you are unable to sit down because you are already sitting in the only chair available. If a visitor enters the room, you know who they are straight away. Even if two, three or many visitors come into the room together, you instantly know who they are because they have nowhere to sit down. You occupy the only seat available, so every single visitor who comes in is quite obvious to you and unable to stay for very long.

You can observe all the visitors at your ease because they don't have anywhere to sit down. You fix awareness on investigating the three characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self and hold your attention on this contemplation not sending it anywhere else. Insight into the transient, unsatisfactory and selfless nature of all phenomena steadily grows clearer and more comprehensive. Your understanding grows more profound. Such clarity of insight leads to a peace that penetrates deeper into your heart than any you might experience from the practice of tranquillity (samatha) meditation. It is the clarity and completeness of this insight into the way things are that has a purifying effect on the mind. Wisdom arising as a result of deep and crystal clear insight acts as the agent of purification.

Through repeated examination and contemplation of the truth, over time, your views change and what you once mistakenly perceived as attractive gradually loses its appeal as the truth of its unattractive nature becomes apparent. You investigate phenomena to see if they are really permanent or of a transient nature. At first you simply recite to yourself the teaching that all conditions are impermanent, but after time you actually see the truth clearly from your investigation. The truth is waiting to be found right at the point of investigation. This is the seat where you wait to receive visitors. There is nowhere else you could go to develop insight. You must remain seated on this one spot - the only chair in the room. As visitors enter your reception room, it is easy to observe their appearance and the way they behave, because they are unable to sit down; inevitably you get to know all about them. In other words you arrive at a clear and distinct understanding of the impermanent, unsatisfactory and selfless nature of all these phenomena and this insight has become so indisputable and firm in your mind, that it puts an end to any remaining uncertainty about the true nature of things. You know for certain that there is no other possible way of viewing experience. This is realization of the Dhamma at the most profound level. Ultimately, your meditation involves sustaining the knowing, followed by continuous letting go as you experience sense objects through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind.

It involves just this much and there is no need to make anything more out of it.

The important thing is to put repeated effort into developing insight through investigation of the three characteristics. Everything can become a cause for wisdom to arise, and that is what completely destroys all forms of defilement and attachment. This is the fruit of vipassanā meditation. But don't assume that everything you do is coming from insight. Sometimes you still do things following your own desires. If you are still practising following your desires, then you will only put effort in on the days when you are feeling energetic and inspired, and you won't do any meditation on the days when you are feeling lazy. That's called practising under the influence of the defilements. It means you don't have any real power over your mind and just follow your desires.

When your mind is in line with the Dhamma, there is no one who is diligent and there is no one who is lazy. It's a matter of how the mind is conditioned. The practice of insight keeps flowing automatically without laziness or diligence. It's a state that is self-sustaining, fuelled by its own energy. Once the mind has these characteristics, it means you no longer have to be the doer in the practice. You could say that it's as if you have finished all the work you have been doing and the only thing left is for you to leave things to themselves and watch over the mind. You don't have to be someone who is doing something anymore. There is still mental activity occurring - you experience pleasant and unpleasant sense contact according to your kammic accumulations - but you see it as 'just that much' and are letting go of attachment to the sense of self the whole time.

At this point, you aren't creating a self and so you aren't creating any suffering. All the sense objects and moods you experience ultimately have exactly the same value in the mind. Whatever mental or physical phenomena you examine appear the same as everything else, bearing the same inherent qualities. All phenomena become one and the same. Your wisdom has to develop that far for all uncertainty to come to an end in the mind.

When you first start meditating, it seems like all you know how to do is to doubt and speculate about things. The mind is always wavering and vacillating. You spend the whole time caught in agitated thinking and proliferating about things. You have doubts about every last thing. Why? It stems from impatience. You want to know all the answers and fast. You want to have insight quickly, without having to do anything. You want to know the truth of the way things are, but that wanting is so strong in the mind that it is more powerful than the insight you desire. For that reason the practice has to develop in stages. You must go one step at a time. In the first place you need

to put forth persistent effort. You also need the continuous support of your past good actions and development of the ten spiritual perfections (*pāramī*).

Keep summoning up effort in training the mind. Don't get caught into desiring quick results; that just leads you to disappointment and frustration when the insights are slow to come. Thinking like that won't help you. Is it correct to expect suddenly to experience some kind of permanent state where you are experiencing no pleasure or pain at all? It doesn't matter what the mind throws up at you. At that time when you do get overwhelmed by pleasure and pain stimulated by contact between the mind and different sense objects, you don't have any idea what level your practice has reached. But within a short space of time such moods lose power over the mind. Actually, such impingement can be of benefit, because it reminds you to examine your own experience. You get to know what reactions all the sense objects, thoughts and perceptions you experience bring up in the mind. You know, both in the cases when they lead the mind towards agitation and suffering, and when they hardly stir the mind at all. Some meditators just want to have insight into the way the mind is affected by pleasant objects; they only want to investigate the good moods. But that way they never gain true insight. They don't become very smart. Really, you must also examine what happens when you experience unpleasant sense impingement. You have to know what that does to the mind. In the end, that's the way you have to train yourself.

It is also important to understand that when it comes to the practice itself, you don't need to seek out the past experiences and accumulated memories available from external sources, because it's your own experience that counts. The only way to really put an end to your doubts and speculation is through practising until you reach the point where you see the results clearly for yourself. This is the most important thing of all. Learning from different teachers is an essential preliminary to practice. It is a valuable support as you move from hearing the teachings to learning from your own experience. You have to contemplate the teachings you receive in light of your own practice until you gain your own understanding. If you already possess some spiritual qualities and virtue accumulated from the past, practice is more straightforward. When other people give you advice, generally it can save you time, by helping you to avoid mistakes and to go directly to the heart of practice. If you try practising alone without any guidance from others, the path you follow will be a slower one with more detours. If you try to discover the correct way to practise all by yourself, you tend to waste time and end up going the long way round. That's the truth of it. In the end, the practice of Dhamma itself is the surest way to make all the doubting and wavering wither away and vanish. As you keep enduring and training yourself to go against the grain of your defilements the doubts will just shrivel up and die. If you

think about it, you have already gained much from your efforts in the practice. You have made progress, but it's still not enough to make you feel completely satisfied. If you look carefully and reflect on your life, you can see just how much of the world you have experienced through your mind from the time you were born, through your youth until the present. In the past you weren't training yourself in virtue, concentration and wisdom, and it's easy to see just how far the defilements took you. When you look back on all that you have experienced through the senses it becomes obvious that you have been experiencing the truth about the way things are on countless occasions. As you contemplate the things that have happened in your life, it helps lighten the mind as you see that the defilements don't cover it over quite so thickly as before.

From time to time you need to encourage yourself in this way. It takes away some of the heaviness. However, it's not wise to only give yourself praise and encouragement. In training the mind, you have to criticize yourself every now and then. Sometimes you have to force yourself to do things you don't want to do, but you can't push the mind to its limits all the time. As you train yourself in meditation it is normal that the body, which is a conditioned phenomenon, is subject to stress, pain and all sorts of different problems as conditions affect it. It's just normal for the body to be like that. The more you train yourself in sitting meditation, the more skilled at it you become and naturally you can sit for longer periods. At first you might only be able to manage five minutes before you have to get up. But as you practise more, the length of time you can sit comfortably increases from ten to twenty minutes to half an hour, until in the end you can sit for a whole hour without having to get up. Then other people look at you and praise you for being able to sit so long, but at the same time, you might feel within yourself, that you still can't sit for very long at all. This is the way the desire for results can affect you in the course of meditation.

Another important aspect of the training is to sustain the practice of mindfulness evenly in all the four postures of standing, walking, sitting and lying down. Be careful not to mistakenly think that you are only really practising when sitting in the formal meditation posture. Don't see it as the only posture for cultivating mindfulness. That's a mistake. It's quite possible that calm and insight might not even arise during the course of formal sitting meditation. It's only feasible to sit for so many hours and minutes in one day but you have to train yourself in mindfulness constantly as you change from posture to posture, developing a continuous awareness. Whenever you lose awareness, re-establish it as soon as possible to try and keep as much continuity as you can. This is the way to make fast progress. Insight comes quickly. It's the way to become wise. That means wise in understanding sense

objects and how they affect the mind. You use this wisdom to know your moods and to train the mind in letting go. This is how you should understand the way to cultivate the mind. Even as you lie down to sleep, you have to fix attention on the in- and out-breaths until the moment you fall asleep and continue on as soon as you wake up. That way there is only a short period when you are in deep sleep that you are not practising awareness. You have to throw all your energy into training yourself.

Once you have developed awareness, the longer you train yourself, the more wakefulness the mind experiences until you reach a point where you don't seem to sleep at all. Only the body sleeps, the mind remains aware. The mind remains awake and vigilant even as the body sleeps. You remain with the knowing throughout. As soon as you awake, mindfulness is right there from the first moment as the mind leaves the sleeping state and immediately takes hold of a fresh object. You are attentive and watchful. Sleeping is really a function of the body. It involves resting the body. The body takes the rest it needs, but there is still the knowing present, watching over the mind. Awareness is sustained both throughout the day and night.

So, even though you lie down and go to sleep, it's as if the mind doesn't sleep. But you don't feel tired out and hungry for more sleep. You remain alert and attentive. It's for this reason that you hardly dream at all when you are practising in earnest. If you do dream, it is in the form of a *supina nimitta* - an unusually clear and vivid dream that holds some special significance. Generally, however, you experience very few dreams. As you watch over the mind it's as if there are no causes left for the mental proliferation that fuels dreams. You remain in a state where you aren't caught in delusion. You sustain mindfulness, with awareness present deep inside the mind. The mind is in a state of wakefulness, being sharp and responsive. The presence of unbroken mindfulness makes the mind's ability to investigate smooth and effortless and keeps it abreast of whatever is arising from moment to moment.

You have to cultivate the mind until it's totally fluent and skilled in keeping mindfulness and investigating phenomena. Whenever the mind reaches a state of calm, train it in examining your own body and that of other people until you have deep enough insight to see the common characteristics. Pursue the investigation to the point where you see all bodies as having the same essential nature and having come from the same material elements. You must keep observing and contemplating. Before you go to sleep at night, use awareness to sweep over the entire body and repeat the contemplation when you first wake up in the morning. This way you won't have to experience nightmares, talk in your sleep or get caught up in a lot of dreaming. You sleep and wake up peacefully without anything bothering you. You sustain the state

of knowing both in your sleep and as you wake up. When you wake up with mindfulness, the mind is bright, clear and unbothered by sleepiness. As you awaken the mind is radiant, being free from dullness and moods conditioned by the defilements.

Here I have been giving details of the development of the mind in the course of practice. Normally, you wouldn't think it possible that the mind could actually be peaceful during the time you are asleep, when you first wake up or in other situations where you would expect mindfulness to be weak. For instance, you might be sitting down soaking wet having just walked through a heavy rainstorm, but because you have cultivated samādhi and learnt to contemplate, the mind remains untouched by defiled moods and is still able to experience peace and clarity of insight, just as I have been describing.

The last teaching the Buddha gave to the community of monks was an exhortation not to get caught in heedlessness. He said that heedlessness is the way that leads to death. Please understand this and take it to heart as fully and sincerely as you can. Train yourself to think with wisdom. Use wisdom to guide your speech. Whatever you do, use wisdom as your guide.

Learning to Listen

During an informal gathering at his residence one evening, the Ajahn said, 'When you listen to the Dhamma, you must open up your heart and compose yourself in its centre. Don't try and accumulate what you hear, or make painstaking efforts to retain it through your memory. Just let the Dhamma flow into your heart as it reveals itself, and keep yourself continuously open to the flow in the present moment. What is ready to be retained will remain. It will happen of its own accord, not through forced effort on your part.

Similarly, when you expound the Dhamma, there must be no force involved. The Dhamma must flow spontaneously from the present moment according to circumstances. You know, it's strange, but sometimes people come to me and really show no apparent desire to hear the Dhamma, but there it is - it just happens. The Dhamma comes flowing out with no effort whatsoever. Then at other times, people seem to be quite keen to listen. They even formally ask for a discourse, and then, nothing! It just won't happen. What can you do? I don't know why it is, but I know that things happen in this way. It's as though people have different levels of receptivity, and when you are there at the same level, things just happen.

If you must expound the Dhamma, the best way is not to think about it at all. Simply forget it. The more you think and try to plan, the worse it will be. This is hard to do, though, isn't it? Sometimes, when you're flowing along quite smoothly, there will be a pause, and someone may ask a question. Then, suddenly, there's a whole new direction. There seems to be an unlimited source that you can never exhaust.

I believe without a doubt in the Buddha's ability to know the temperaments and receptivity of other beings. He used this very same method of spontaneous teaching. It's not that he needed to use any superhuman power, but rather that he was sensitive to the needs of the people around him and so taught to them accordingly. An instance demonstrating his own spontaneity occurred when once, after he had expounded the Dhamma to a group of his disciples, he asked them if they had ever heard this teaching before. They replied that they had not. He then went on to say that he himself had also never heard it before.

Just continue your practice no matter what you are doing. Practice is not dependent on any one posture, such as sitting or walking. Rather, it is a continuous awareness of the flow of your own consciousness and feelings. No matter what is happening, just compose yourself and always be mindfully aware of that flow.

Later, the Ajahn went on to say, ‘Practice is not moving forward, but there is forward movement. At the same time, it is not moving back, but there is backward movement. And, finally, practice is not stopping and being still, but there is stopping and being still. So there is moving forward and backward as well as being still, but you can’t say that it is any one of the three. Then practice eventually comes to a point where there is neither forward nor backward movement, nor any being still. Where is that?’

On another informal occasion, he said, ‘To define Buddhism without a lot of words and phrases, we can simply say, “Don’t cling or hold on to anything. Harmonize with actuality, with things just as they are.”’

Unshakeable Peace

The whole reason for studying the Dhamma, the teachings of the Buddha, is to search for a way to transcend suffering and attain peace and happiness. Whether we study physical or mental phenomena, the mind (*citta*) or its psychological factors (*cetasikā*), it's only when we make liberation from suffering our ultimate goal that we're on the right path; nothing less. Suffering has a cause and conditions for its existence.

Please clearly understand that when the mind is still, it's in its natural, normal state. As soon as the mind moves, it becomes conditioned (*sankhāra*). When the mind is attracted to something, it becomes conditioned. When aversion arises, it becomes conditioned. The desire to move here and there arises from conditioning. If our awareness doesn't keep pace with these mental proliferations as they occur, the mind will chase after them and be conditioned by them. Whenever the mind moves, at that moment, it becomes a conventional reality.

So the Buddha taught us to contemplate these wavering conditions of the mind. Whenever the mind moves, it becomes unstable and impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) and can not be taken as a self (*anattā*). These are the three universal characteristics of all conditioned phenomena. The Buddha taught us to observe and contemplate these movements of the mind.

It's likewise with the teaching of dependent origination (*paticca-samuppāda*): deluded understanding (*avijjā*) is the cause and condition for the arising of volitional kammic formations (*sankhāra*); which is the cause and condition for the arising of consciousness (*viññāna*); which is the cause and condition for the arising of mentality and materiality (*nāma* and *rūpa*), and so on, just as we've studied in the scriptures. The Buddha separated each link of the chain to make it easier to study. This is an accurate description of reality, but when this process actually occurs in real life, the scholars aren't able to keep up with what's happening. It's like falling from the top of a tree and crashing down to the ground below. We have no idea how many branches we've passed on the way down. Similarly, when the mind is suddenly hit by a mental impression, if it delights in it, then it flies off into a good mood. It considers it good without being aware of the chain of conditions that led there. The process takes place in accordance with what is outlined in the theory, but simultaneously it goes beyond the limits of that theory.

There's nothing that announces, 'This is delusion. These are volitional kammic formations, and that is consciousness.' The process doesn't give the scholars a chance to read out the list as it's happening. Although the Buddha

analysed and explained the sequence of mind moments in minute detail, to me it's more like falling out of a tree. As we come crashing down there's no opportunity to estimate how many feet and inches we've fallen. What we do know is that we've hit the ground with a thud and it hurts!

The mind is the same. When it falls for something, what we're aware of is the pain. Where has all this suffering, pain, grief, and despair come from? It didn't come from theory in a book. There isn't anywhere where the details of our suffering are written down. Our pain won't correspond exactly with the theory, but the two travel along the same road. So scholarship alone can't keep pace with the reality. That's why the Buddha taught us to cultivate clear knowing for ourselves. Whatever arises, arises in this knowing. When that which knows, knows in accordance with the truth, then the mind and its psychological factors are recognized as not ours. Ultimately all these phenomena are to be discarded and thrown away as if they were rubbish. We shouldn't cling to or give them any meaning.

Theory and Reality

The Buddha did not teach about the mind and its psychological factors so that we'd get attached to the concepts. His sole intention was that we would recognize them as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self. Then let go. Lay them aside. Be aware and know them as they arise. This mind has already been conditioned. It's been trained and conditioned to turn away and spin out from a state of pure awareness. As it spins it creates conditioned phenomena which further influence the mind, and the proliferation carries on. The process gives birth to the good, the evil, and everything else under the sun. The Buddha taught to abandon it all. Initially, however, you have to familiarize yourself with the theory in order that you'll be able to abandon it all at the later stage. This is a natural process. The mind is just this way. Psychological factors are just this way.

Take the Noble Eightfold Path, for example. When wisdom (*paññā*) views things correctly with insight, this right view then leads to right intention, right speech, right action, and so on. This all involves psychological conditions that have arisen from that pure knowing awareness. This knowing is like a lantern shedding light on the path ahead on a dark night. If the knowing is right, if it is in accordance with truth, it will pervade and illuminate each of the other steps on the path in turn.

Whatever we experience, it all arises from within this knowing. If this mind did not exist, the knowing would not exist either. All these are phenomena of the mind. As the Buddha said, the mind is merely the mind. It's not a being, a person, a self, or yourself. It's neither us nor them. The Dhamma is simply the Dhamma. It is a natural, selfless process. It does not belong to us or anyone

else. It's not anything. Whatever an individual experiences, it all falls within five fundamental categories (*khandhā*): body, feeling, memory / perception, thoughts and consciousness. The Buddha said to let it all go.

Meditation is like a single stick of wood. Insight (*vipassanā*) is one end of the stick and serenity (*samatha*) the other. If we pick it up, does only one end come up or do both? When anyone picks up a stick both ends rise together. Which part then is *vipassanā*, and which is *samatha*? Where does one end and the other begin? They are both the mind. As the mind becomes peaceful, initially the peace will arise from the serenity of *samatha*. We focus and unify the mind in states of meditative peace (*samādhi*). However, if the peace and stillness of *samādhi* fades away, suffering arises in its place. Why is that? Because the peace afforded by *samatha* meditation alone is still based on attachment. This attachment can then be a cause of suffering. Serenity is not the end of the path. The Buddha saw from his own experience that such peace of mind was not the ultimate. The causes underlying the process of existence (*bhava*) had not yet been brought to cessation (*nirodha*). The conditions for rebirth still existed. His spiritual work had not yet attained perfection. Why? Because there was still suffering. So based on that serenity of *samatha* he proceeded to contemplate, investigate, and analyse the conditioned nature of reality until he was free of all attachments, even the attachment to serenity. Serenity is still part of the world of conditioned existence and conventional reality. Clinging to this type of peace is clinging to conventional reality, and as long as we cling, we will be mired in existence and rebirth. Delighting in the peace of *samatha* still leads to further existence and rebirth. Once the mind's restlessness and agitation calms down, one clings to the resultant peace.

So the Buddha examined the causes and conditions underlying existence and rebirth. As long as he had not yet fully penetrated the matter and understood the truth, he continued to probe deeper and deeper with a peaceful mind, reflecting on how all things, peaceful or not, come into existence. His investigation forged ahead until it was clear to him that everything that comes into existence is like a lump of red-hot iron. The five categories of a being's experience (*khandhā*) are all a lump of red-hot iron. When a lump of iron is glowing red-hot, is there anywhere you can touch it without getting burnt? Is there anywhere at all that is cool? Try touching it on the top, the sides, or underneath. Is there a single spot that can be found that's cool? Impossible. This searing lump of iron is entirely red-hot. We can't even attach to serenity. If we identify with that peace, assuming that there is someone who is calm and serene, this reinforces the sense that there is an independent self or soul. This sense of self is part of conventional reality. Thinking, 'I'm peaceful,' 'I'm agitated,' 'I'm good,' 'I'm bad,' 'I'm happy,' or 'I'm unhappy,' we are

caught in more existence and birth. It's more suffering. If our happiness vanishes, then we're unhappy instead. When our sorrow vanishes, then we're happy again. Caught in this endless cycle, we revolve repeatedly through heaven and hell.

Before his enlightenment, the Buddha recognized this pattern in his own heart. He knew that the conditions for existence and rebirth had not yet ceased. His work was not yet finished. Focusing on life's conditionality, he contemplated in accordance with nature: 'Due to this cause there is birth, due to birth there is death, and all this movement of coming and going.' So the Buddha took up these themes for contemplation in order to understand the truth about the five (*khandhā*). Everything mental and physical, everything conceived and thought about, without exception, is conditioned. Once he knew this, he taught us to set it down. Once he knew this, he taught to abandon it all. He encouraged others to understand in accordance with this truth. If we don't, we'll suffer. We won't be able to let go of these things. However, once we do see the truth of the matter, we'll recognize how these things delude us. As the Buddha taught, 'The mind has no substance, it's not anything.'

The mind isn't born belonging to anyone. It doesn't die as anyone's. This mind is free, brilliantly radiant, and unentangled with any problems or issues. The reason problems arise is because the mind is deluded by conditioned things, deluded by this misperception of self. So the Buddha taught to observe this mind. In the beginning what is there? There is truly nothing there. It doesn't arise with conditioned things, and it doesn't die with them. When the mind encounters something good, it doesn't change to become good. When the mind encounters something bad, it doesn't become bad as well. That's how it is when there is clear insight into one's nature. There is understanding that this is essentially a substance-less state of affairs.

The Buddha's insight saw it all as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self. He wants us to fully comprehend in the same way. The knowing then knows in accordance with truth. When it knows happiness or sorrow, it remains unmoved. The emotion of happiness is a form of birth. The tendency to become sad is a form of death. When there's death there is birth, and what is born has to die. That which arises and passes away is caught in this unremitting cycle of becoming. Once the meditator's mind comes to this state of understanding, no doubt remains about whether there is further becoming and rebirth. There's no need to ask anyone else.

The Buddha comprehensively investigated conditioned phenomena and so was able to let it all go. The five khandhas were let go of, and the knowing carried on merely as an impartial observer of the process. If he experienced

something positive, he didn't become positive along with it. He simply observed and remained aware. If he experienced something negative, he didn't become negative. And why was that? Because his mind had been cut free from such causes and conditions. He'd penetrated the Truth. The conditions leading to rebirth no longer existed. This is the knowing that is certain and reliable. This is a mind that is truly at peace. This is what is not born, doesn't age, doesn't get sick, and doesn't die. This is neither cause nor effect, nor dependent on cause and effect. It is independent of the process of causal conditioning. The causes then cease with no conditioning remaining. This mind is above and beyond birth and death, above and beyond happiness and sorrow, above and beyond both good and evil. What can you say? It's beyond the limitations of language to describe it. All supporting conditions have ceased and any attempt to describe it will merely lead to attachment. The words used then become the theory of the mind.

Theoretical descriptions of the mind and its workings are accurate, but the Buddha realized that this type of knowledge was relatively useless. We understand something intellectually and then believe it, but it's of no real benefit. It doesn't lead to peace of mind. The knowing of the Buddha leads to letting go. It results in abandoning and renunciation, because it's precisely this mind that leads us to get involved with both what's right and what's wrong. If we're smart we get involved with those things that are right. If we're stupid we get involved with those things that are wrong. Such a mind is the world, and the Blessed One took the things of this world to examine this very world. Having come to know the world as it actually was, he was then known as the 'One who clearly comprehends the world'.

Concerning this issue of samatha and vipassanā, the important thing is to develop these states in our own hearts. Only when we genuinely cultivate them ourselves will we know what they actually are. We can go and study what all the books say about psychological factors of the mind, but that kind of intellectual understanding is useless for actually cutting off selfish desire, anger, and delusion. We only study the theory about selfish desire, anger, and delusion, merely describing the various characteristics of these mental defilements: 'Selfish desire has this meaning; anger means that; delusion is defined as this.' Only knowing their theoretical qualities, we can talk about them only on that level. We know and we are intelligent, but when these defilements actually appear in our minds, do they correspond with the theory or not? When, for instance, we experience something undesirable do we react and get into a bad mood? Do we attach? Can we let it go? If aversion comes up and we recognize it, do we still hang on to it? Or once we have seen it, do we let it go? If we find that we see something we don't like and retain that aversion in our hearts, we'd better go back and start studying again. It's still

not right. The practice is not yet perfect. When it reaches perfection, letting go happens. Look at it in this light.

We truly have to look deeply into our own hearts if we want to experience the fruits of this practice. Attempting to describe the psychology of the mind in terms of the numerous separate moments of consciousness and their different characteristics is, in my opinion, not taking the practice far enough. There's still a lot more to it. If we are going to study these things, then we need to know them absolutely, with clarity and penetrative understanding. Without clarity of insight, how will we ever be finished with them? There's no end to it. We'll never complete our studies.

Practising Dhamma is thus extremely important. When I practised, that's how I studied. I didn't know anything about mind moments or psychological factors. I just observed the quality of knowing. If a thought of hate arose, I asked myself why. If a thought of love arose, I asked myself why. This is the way. Whether it's labelled as a thought or called a psychological factor, so what? Just penetrate this one point until you're able to resolve these feelings of love and hate, until they completely vanish from the heart. When I was able to stop loving and hating under any circumstance, I was able to transcend suffering. Then it doesn't matter what happens; the heart and mind are released and at ease. Nothing remains. It has all stopped.

Practise like this. If people want to talk a lot about theory that's their business. But no matter how much it's debated, the practice always comes down to this single point right here. When something arises, it arises right here. Whether a lot or a little, it originates right here. When it ceases, the cessation is right here. Where else? The Buddha called this point the 'Knowing'. When it knows the way things are accurately, in line with the truth, we'll understand the meaning of mind.

Things incessantly deceive. As you study them, they're simultaneously deceiving you. How else can I put it? Even though you know about them, you are still being deluded by them precisely where you know them. That's the situation. The issue is this: it's my opinion that the Buddha didn't intend that we only know what these things are called. The aim of the Buddha's teachings is to figure out the way to liberate ourselves from these things through searching for the underlying causes.

Sīla, Samādhi, and Paññā

I practised Dhamma without knowing a great deal. I just knew that the path to liberation began with virtue (sīla). Virtue is the beautiful beginning of the Path. The deep peace of samādhi is the beautiful middle. Wisdom (paññā) is the beautiful end. Although they can be separated as three unique aspects of

the training, as we look into them more and more deeply, these three qualities converge as one. To uphold virtue, you have to be wise. We usually advise people to develop ethical standards first by keeping the Five Precepts so that their virtue will become solid. However, the perfection of virtue takes a lot of wisdom. We have to consider our speech and actions, and analyse their consequences. This is all the work of wisdom. We have to rely on our wisdom in order to cultivate virtue.

According to the theory, virtue comes first, then samādhi and then wisdom, but when I examined it I found that wisdom is the foundation stone for every other aspect of the practice. In order to fully comprehend the consequences of what we say and do - especially the harmful consequences - we need to use wisdom to guide and supervise, to scrutinize the workings of cause and effect. This will purify our actions and speech. Once we become familiar with ethical and unethical behaviour, we see the place to practise. We then abandon what's bad and cultivate what's good. We abandon what's wrong and cultivate what's right. This is virtue. As we do this, the heart becomes increasingly firm and steadfast. A steadfast and unwavering heart is free of apprehension, remorse, and confusion concerning our actions and speech. This is samādhi.

This stable unification of mind forms a secondary and more powerful source of energy in our Dhamma practice, allowing a deeper contemplation of the sights, sounds, etc., that we experience. Once the mind is established with firm and unwavering mindfulness and peace, we can engage in sustained inquiry into the reality of the body, feeling, perception, thought, consciousness, sights, sounds, smells, tastes, bodily sensations and objects of mind. As they continually arise, we continually investigate with a sincere determination not to lose our mindfulness. Then we'll know what these things actually are. They come into existence following their own natural truth. As our understanding steadily grows, wisdom is born. Once there's clear comprehension of the way things truly are, our old perceptions are uprooted and our conceptual knowledge transforms into wisdom. That's how virtue, samādhi and wisdom merge and function as one.

As wisdom increases in strength and intrepidity, samādhi evolves to become increasingly firm. The more unshakeable samādhi is, the more unshakeable and all-encompassing virtue becomes. As virtue is perfected, it nurtures samādhi, and the additional strengthening of samādhi leads to a maturing of wisdom. These three aspects of the training mesh and intertwine. United, they form the Noble Eightfold Path, the way of the Buddha. Once virtue, samādhi, and wisdom reach their peak, this Path has the power to eradicate those things which defile (kilesā) the mind's purity. When sensual desire comes up, when anger and delusion show their face, this Path is the only thing capable of

cutting them down in their tracks.

The framework for Dhamma practice is the Four Noble Truths: suffering (*dukkha*), the origin of suffering (*samudaya*), the cessation of suffering (*nirodha*) and the Path leading to the cessation of suffering (*magga*). This Path consists of virtue, samādhi and wisdom, the framework for training the heart. Their true meaning is not to be found in these words but dwells in the depth of our hearts. That's what virtue, samādhi and wisdom are like. They revolve continually. The Noble Eightfold Path will envelop any sight, sound, smell, taste, bodily sensation, or object of mind that arises. However, if the factors of the Eightfold Path are weak and timid, the defilements will possess our minds. If the Noble Path is strong and courageous, it will conquer and destroy the defilements. If the defilements are powerful and brave while the Path is feeble and frail, the defilements will conquer the Path. They conquer our hearts. If the knowing isn't quick and nimble enough as forms, feelings, perceptions, and thoughts are experienced, they possess and devastate us. The Path and the defilements proceed in tandem. As Dhamma practice develops in the heart, these two forces have to battle it out every step of the way. It's as though there are two people arguing inside the mind, but it's just the Path of Dhamma and the defilements struggling to win domination of the heart. The Path guides and fosters our ability to contemplate. As long as we are able to contemplate accurately, the defilements will be losing ground. But if we are shaky, whenever defilements regroup and regain their strength, the Path will be routed as defilements take its place. The two sides will continue to fight it out until eventually there is a victor and the whole affair is settled.

If we focus our endeavour on developing the way of Dhamma, defilements will be gradually and persistently eradicated. Once fully cultivated, the Four Noble Truths reside in our hearts. Whatever form suffering takes, it always exists due to a cause. That's the Second Noble Truth. And what is the cause? Weak virtue. Weak samādhi. Weak wisdom. When the Path isn't durable, the defilements dominate the mind. When they dominate, the Second Noble Truth comes into play, and it gives rise to all sorts of suffering. Once we are suffering, those qualities which are able to quell the suffering disappear. The conditions which give rise to the Path are virtue, samādhi, and wisdom. When they have attained full strength, the Path of Dhamma is unstoppable, advancing unceasingly to overcome the attachment and clinging that bring us so much anguish. Suffering can't arise because the Path is destroying the defilements. It's at this point that cessation of suffering occurs. Why is the Path able to bring about the cessation of suffering? Because virtue, samādhi, and wisdom are attaining their peak of perfection, and the Path has gathered an unstoppable momentum. It all comes together right here. I would say for anyone who practises like this, theoretical ideas about the mind don't come

into the picture. If the mind is liberated from these, then it is utterly dependable and certain. Now whatever path it takes, we don't have to goad it much to keep it going straight.

Consider the leaves of a mango tree. What are they like? By examining just a single leaf we know. Even if there are ten thousand of them we know what all those leaves are like. Just look at one leaf. The others are essentially the same. Similarly with the trunk. We only have to see the trunk of one mango tree to know the characteristics of them all. Just look at one tree. All the other mango trees will be essentially no different. Even if there were one hundred thousand of them, if I knew one I'd know them all. This is what the Buddha taught.

Virtue, samādhi, and wisdom constitute the Path of the Buddha. But the way is not the essence of the Dhamma. The Path isn't an end in itself, not the ultimate aim of the Blessed One. But it's the way leading inwards. It's just like how you travelled from Bangkok to my monastery, Wat Nong Pah Pong. It's not the road you were after. What you wanted was to reach the monastery, but you needed the road for the journey. The road you travelled on is not the monastery. It's just the way to get here. But if you want to arrive at the monastery, you have to follow the road. It's the same with virtue, samādhi, and wisdom. We could say they are not the essence of the Dhamma, but they are the road to arrive there. When virtue, samādhi, and wisdom have been mastered, the result is profound peace of mind. That's the destination. Once we've arrived at this peace, even if we hear a noise, the mind remains unruffled. Once we've reached this peace, there's nothing remaining to do. The Buddha taught to give it all up. Whatever happens, there's nothing to worry about. Then we truly, unquestionably, know for ourselves. We no longer simply believe what other people say.

The essential principle of Buddhism is empty of any phenomena. It's not contingent upon miraculous displays of psychic powers, paranormal abilities, or anything else mystical or bizarre. The Buddha did not emphasize the importance of these things. Such powers, however, do exist and may be possible to develop, but this facet of Dhamma is deluding, so the Buddha did not advocate or encourage it. The only people he praised were the ones who were able to liberate themselves from suffering.

To accomplish this requires training, and the tools and equipment to get the job done are generosity, virtue, samādhi, and wisdom. We have to take them up and train with them. Together they form a Path inclining inwards, and wisdom is the first step. This Path can not mature if the mind is encrusted with defilements, but if we are stout-hearted and strong, the Path will eliminate these impurities. However, if it's the defilements that are stout-hearted and strong they will destroy the Path. Dhamma practice simply

involves these two forces battling it out incessantly until the end of the road is reached. They engage in unremitting battle until the very end.

The Dangers of Attachment

Using the tools of practice entails hardship and arduous challenges. We rely on patience, endurance and going without. We have to do it ourselves, experience it for ourselves, realize it ourselves. Scholars, however, tend to get confused a lot. For example, when they sit in meditation, as soon as their minds experience a teeny bit of tranquillity they start to think, ‘Hey, this must be first *jhāna*.’ This is how their minds work. And once those thoughts arise the tranquillity they’d experienced is shattered. Soon they start to think that it must have been the second *jhāna* they’d attained. Don’t think and speculate about it. There aren’t any billboards which announce which level of samādhi we’re experiencing. The reality is completely different. There aren’t any signs like the road signs that tell you, ‘This way to Wat Nong Pah Pong.’ That’s not how I read the mind. It doesn’t announce.

Although a number of highly esteemed scholars have written descriptions of the first, second, third, and fourth *jhāna*, what’s written is merely external information. If the mind actually enters these states of profound peace, it doesn’t know anything about those written descriptions. It knows, but what it knows isn’t the same as the theory we study. If the scholars try to clutch their theory and drag it into their meditation, sitting and pondering, ‘Hmm ... what could this be? Is this first *jhāna* yet?’ There! The peace is shattered, and they don’t experience anything of real value. And why is that? Because there is desire, and once there’s craving what happens? The mind simultaneously withdraws out of the meditation. So it’s necessary for all of us to relinquish thinking and speculation. Abandon them completely. Just take up the body, speech and mind and delve entirely into the practice. Observe the workings of the mind, but don’t lug the Dhamma books in there with you. Otherwise everything becomes a big mess, because nothing in those books corresponds precisely to the reality of the way things truly are.

People who study a lot, who are full of theoretical knowledge, usually don’t succeed in Dhamma practice. They get bogged down at the information level. The truth is, the heart and mind can’t be measured by external standards. If the mind is getting peaceful, just allow it to be peaceful. The most profound levels of deep peace do exist. Personally, I didn’t know much about the theory of practice. I’d been a monk for three years and still had a lot of questions about what samādhi actually was. I kept trying to think about it and figure it out as I meditated, but my mind became even more restless and distracted than it had been before! The amount of thinking actually increased. When I wasn’t meditating it was more peaceful. Boy, was it difficult, so exasperating!

But even though I encountered so many obstacles, I never threw in the towel. I just kept on doing it. When I wasn't trying to do anything in particular, my mind was relatively at ease. But whenever I determined to make the mind unify in samādhi, it went out of control. 'What's going on here,' I wondered. 'Why is this happening?'

Later on I began to realize that meditation was comparable to the process of breathing. If we're determined to force the breath to be shallow, deep or just right, it's very difficult to do. However, if we go for a stroll and we're not even aware of when we're breathing in or out, it's extremely relaxing. So I reflected, 'Aha! Maybe that's the way it works.' When a person is normally walking around in the course of the day, not focusing attention on their breath, does their breathing cause them suffering? No, they just feel relaxed. But when I'd sit down and vow with determination that I was going to make my mind peaceful, clinging and attachment set in. When I tried to control the breath to be shallow or deep, it just brought on more stress than I had before. Why? Because the willpower I was using was tainted with clinging and attachment. I didn't know *what* was going on. All that frustration and hardship was coming up because I was bringing craving into the meditation.

Unshakeable Peace

I once stayed in a forest monastery that was half a mile from a village. One night the villagers were celebrating with a loud party as I was doing walking meditation. It must have been after 11:00 and I was feeling a bit peculiar. I'd been feeling strange like this since midday. My mind was quiet. There were hardly any thoughts. I felt very relaxed and at ease. I did walking meditation until I was tired and then went to sit in my grass-roofed hut. As I sat down I barely had time to cross my legs before, amazingly, my mind just wanted to delve into a profound state of peace. It happened all by itself. As soon as I sat down, the mind became truly peaceful. It was rock solid. It wasn't as if I couldn't hear the noise of the villagers singing and dancing - I still could - but I could also shut the sound out entirely.

Strange. When I didn't pay attention to the sound, it was perfectly quiet - I didn't hear a thing. But if I wanted to hear, I could, without it being a disturbance. It was like there were two objects in my mind that were placed side by side but not touching. I could see that the mind and its object of awareness were separate and distinct, just like this spittoon and water kettle here. Then I understood: when the mind unifies in samādhi, if you direct your attention outward you can hear, but if you let it dwell in its emptiness then it's perfectly silent. When sound was perceived, I could see that the knowing and the sound were distinctly different. I contemplated: 'If this isn't the way it is, how else could it be?' That's the way it was. These two things were totally

separate. I continued investigating like this until my understanding deepened even further: 'Ah, this is important. When the perceived continuity of phenomena is cut, the result is peace.' The previous illusion of continuity (*santati*) transformed into peace of mind (*santi*). So I continued to sit, putting effort into the meditation. The mind at that time was focused solely on the meditation, indifferent to everything else. Had I stopped meditating at this point it would have been merely because it was complete. I could have taken it easy, but it wouldn't have been because of laziness, tiredness, or feeling annoyed. Not at all. These were absent from the heart. There was only perfect inner balance and equipoise - just right.

Eventually I did take a break, but it was only the posture of sitting that changed. My heart remained constant, unwavering and unflagging. I pulled a pillow over, intending to take a rest. As I reclined, the mind remained just as peaceful as it had been before. Then, just before my head hit the pillow, the mind's awareness began flowing inwards, I didn't know where it was headed, but it kept flowing deeper and deeper within. It was like a current of electricity flowing down a cable to a switch. When it hit the switch my body exploded with a deafening bang. The knowing during that time was extremely lucid and subtle. Once past that point the mind was released to penetrate deeply inside. It went inside to the point where there wasn't anything at all. Absolutely nothing from the outside world could come into that place. Nothing at all could reach it. Having dwelt internally for some time, the mind then retreated to flow back out. However, when I say it retreated, I don't mean to imply that I made it flow back out. I was simply an observer, only knowing and witnessing. The mind came out more and more until it finally returned to normal.

Once my normal state of consciousness returned, the question arose, 'What was that?!' The answer came immediately, 'These things happen of their own accord. You don't have to search for an explanation.' This answer was enough to satisfy my mind.

After a short time my mind again began flowing inwards. I wasn't making any conscious effort to direct the mind. It took off by itself. As it moved deeper and deeper inside, it again hit that same switch. This time my body shattered into the most minute particles and fragments. Again the mind was released to penetrate deeply inside itself. Utter silence. It was even more profound than the first time. Absolutely nothing external could reach it. The mind abided here for some time, for as long as it wished, and then retreated to flow outwards. At that time it was following its own momentum and happening all by itself. I wasn't influencing or directing my mind to be in any particular way, to flow inwards or retreat outwards. I was merely the one

knowing and watching.

My mind again returned to its normal state of consciousness, and I didn't wonder or speculate about what was happening. As I meditated, the mind once again inclined inwards. This time the entire cosmos shattered and disintegrated into minute particles. The earth, ground, mountains, fields and forests - the whole world - disintegrated into the space element. People had vanished. Everything had disappeared. On this third time absolutely nothing remained.

The mind, having inclined inwards, settled down there for as long as it wished. I can't say I understand exactly how it remained there. It's difficult to describe what happened. There's nothing I can compare it to. No simile is apt. This time the mind remained inside far longer than it had previously, and only after some time did it come out of that state. When I say it came out, I don't mean to imply that I made it come out or that I was controlling what was happening. The mind did it all by itself. I was merely an observer. Eventually it again returned to its normal state of consciousness. How could you put a name on what happened during these three times? Who knows? What term are you going to use to label it?

The Power of Samādhi

Everything I've been relating to you concerns the mind following the way of nature. This was no theoretical description of the mind or of psychological states. There's no need for that. When there's faith or confidence, you get in there and really do it. Not just playing around, you put your life on the line. And when your practice reaches the stage that I've been describing, afterwards the whole world is turned upside down. Your understanding of reality is completely different. Your view is utterly transformed. If someone saw you at that moment, they might think you were insane. If this experience happened to someone who didn't have a thorough grip on themselves, they might actually go crazy, because nothing is the same as it was before. The people of the world appear differently from how they used to. But you're the only one who sees this. Absolutely everything changes. Your thoughts are transmuted: other people now think in one way, while you think in another. They speak about things in one way, while you speak in another. They're descending one path while you're climbing another. You're no longer the same as other human beings. This way of experiencing things doesn't deteriorate. It persists and carries on. Give it a try. If it really is as I describe, you won't have to go searching very far. Just look into your own heart. This heart is staunchly courageous, unshakably bold. This is the heart's power, its source of strength and energy. The heart has this potential strength. This is the power and force of samādhi.

At this point it's still just the power and purity that the mind derives from samādhi. This level of samādhi is samādhi at its ultimate. The mind has attained the summit of samādhi; it's not mere momentary concentration. If you were to switch to vipassanā meditation at this point, the contemplation would be uninterrupted and insightful. Or you could take that focused energy and use it in other ways. From this point on you could develop psychic powers, perform miraculous feats or use it anyway you wanted.

Ascetics and hermits have used samādhi energy for making holy water, talismans or casting spells. These things are all possible at this stage, and may be of some benefit in their own way; but it's like the benefit of alcohol. You drink it and then you get drunk.

This level of samādhi is a rest stop. The Buddha stopped and rested here. It forms the foundation for contemplation and vipassanā. However, it's not necessary to have such profound samādhi as this in order to observe the conditions around us, so keep on steadily contemplating the process of cause and effect. To do this we focus the peace and clarity of our minds to analyse the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, physical sensations, thoughts, and mental states we experience. Examine moods and emotions, whether positive or negative, happy or unhappy. Examine everything. It's as though someone else has climbed up a mango tree and is shaking down the fruit while we wait underneath to gather them up. The ones which are rotten, we don't pick up. Just gather the good mangoes. It's not exhausting, because we don't have to climb up the tree. We simply wait underneath to reap the fruit.

Do you get the meaning of this simile? Everything experienced with a peaceful mind confers greater understanding. No longer do we create proliferating interpretations around what is experienced. Wealth, fame, blame, praise, happiness, and unhappiness come of their own accord. And we're at peace. We're wise. It's actually fun. It becomes fun to sift through and sort out these things. What other people call good, bad, evil, here, there, happiness, unhappiness, or whatever - it all gets taken in for our own profit. Someone else has climbed up the mango tree and is shaking the branches to make the mangoes fall down to us. We simply enjoy ourselves gathering the fruit without fear. What's there to be afraid of anyway? It's someone else who's shaking the mangoes down to us. Wealth, fame, praise, criticism, happiness, unhappiness, and all the rest are no more than mangoes falling down, and we examine them with a serene heart. Then we'll know which ones are good and which are rotten.

Working in Accord with Nature

When we begin to wield the peace and serenity we've been developing in meditation to contemplate these things, wisdom arises. This is what I call

wisdom. This is vipassanā. It's not something fabricated and construed. If we're wise, vipassanā will develop naturally. We don't have to label what's happening. If there's only a little clarity of insight, we call this 'little vipassanā'. When clear seeing increases a bit, we call that 'moderate vipassanā'. If knowing is fully in accordance with the Truth, we call that 'ultimate vipassanā'. Personally I prefer to use the word paññā (wisdom) rather than 'vipassanā'. If we think we are going to sit down from time to time and practise 'vipassanā meditation', we're going to have a very difficult time of it. Insight has to proceed from peace and tranquillity. The entire process will happen naturally of its own accord. We can't force it.

The Buddha taught that this process matures at its own rate. Having reached this level of practice, we allow it to develop according to our innate capabilities, spiritual aptitude and the merit we've accumulated in the past. But we never stop putting effort into the practice. Whether the progress is swift or slow is out of our control. It's just like planting a tree. The tree knows how fast it should grow. If we want it to grow more quickly than it is, this is pure delusion. If we want it to grow more slowly, recognize this as delusion as well. If we do the work, the results will be forthcoming - just like planting a tree. For example, say we wanted to plant a chilli bush. Our responsibility is to dig a hole, plant the seedling, water it, fertilize it and protect it from insects. This is our job, our end of the bargain. This is where faith then comes in. Whether the chilli plant grows or not is up to it. It's not our business. We can't go tugging on the plant, trying to stretch it and make it grow faster. That's not how nature works. Our responsibility is to water and fertilize it. Practising Dhamma in the same way puts our hearts at ease.

If we realize enlightenment in this lifetime, that's fine. If we have to wait until our next life, no matter. We have faith and unfaltering conviction in the Dhamma. Whether we progress quickly or slowly is up to our innate capabilities, spiritual aptitude, and the merit we've accumulated so far. Practising like this puts the heart at ease. It's like we're riding in a horse cart. We don't put the cart before the horse. Or it's like trying to plough a rice paddy while walking in front of our water buffalo rather than behind. What I'm saying here is that the mind is getting ahead of itself. It's impatient to get quick results. That's not the way to do it. Don't walk in front of your water buffalo. You have to walk *behind* the water buffalo.

It's just like that chilli plant we are nurturing. Give it water and fertilizer, and it will do the job of absorbing the nutrients. When ants or termites come to infest it, we chase them away. Doing just this much is enough for the chilli to grow beautifully on its own, and once it is growing beautifully, we don't try to force it to flower when we think it should flower. It's none of our business. It

will just create useless suffering. Allow it to bloom on its own. And once the flowers do bloom, don't demand that it immediately produce chilli peppers. Don't rely on coercion. That really causes suffering! Once we figure this out, we understand what our responsibilities are and what they are not. Each has their specific duty to fulfil. The mind knows its role in the work to be done. If the mind doesn't understand its role, it will try to force the chilli plant to produce peppers on the very day we plant it. The mind will insist that it grow, flower, and produce peppers all in one day.

This is nothing but the second Noble Truth: craving causes suffering to arise. If we are aware of this Truth and ponder it, we'll understand that trying to force results in our Dhamma practice is pure delusion. It's wrong. Understanding how it works, we let go and allow things to mature according to our innate capabilities, spiritual aptitude and the merit we've accumulated. We keep doing our part. Don't worry that it might take a long time. Even if it takes a hundred or a thousand lifetimes to get enlightened, so what? However many lifetimes it takes we just keep practising with a heart at ease, comfortable with our pace. Once our mind has entered the stream, there's nothing to fear. It will have gone beyond even the smallest evil action. The Buddha said that the mind of a *sotāpanna*, someone who has attained the first stage of enlightenment, has entered the stream of Dhamma that flows to enlightenment. These people will never again have to experience the grim lower realms of existence, never again fall into hell. How could they possibly fall into hell when their minds have abandoned evil? They've seen the danger in making bad kamma. Even if you tried to force them to do or say something evil, they would be incapable of it, so there's no chance of ever again descending into hell or the lower realms of existence. Their minds are flowing with the current of Dhamma.

Once you're in the stream, you know what your responsibilities are. You comprehend the work ahead. You understand how to practise Dhamma. You know when to strive hard and when to relax. You comprehend your body and mind, this physical and mental process, and you renounce the things that should be renounced, continually abandoning without a shred of doubt.

Changing our Vision

In my life of practising Dhamma, I didn't attempt to master a wide range of subjects. Just one. I refined this heart. Say we look at a body. If we find that we're attracted to a body then analyse it. Have a good look: head hair, body hair, nails, teeth and skin.¹ The Buddha taught us to thoroughly and repeatedly contemplate these parts of the body. Visualize them separately, pull them apart, peel off the skin and burn them up. This is how to do it. Stick with this meditation until it's firmly established and unwavering. See everyone the

same. For example, when the monks and novices go into the village on almsround in the morning, whoever they see - whether it's another monk or a villager - they imagine him or her as a dead body, a walking corpse staggering along on the road ahead of them. Remain focused on this perception. This is how to put forth effort. It leads to maturity and development. When you see a young woman whom you find attractive, imagine her as a walking corpse, her body putrid and reeking from decomposition. See everyone like that. And don't let them get too close! Don't allow the infatuation to persist in your heart. If you perceive others as putrid and reeking, I can assure you the infatuation won't persist. Contemplate until you're sure about what you're seeing, until it's definite, until you're proficient. Whatever path you then wander down you won't go astray. Put your whole heart into it. Whenever you see someone it's no different from looking at a corpse. Whether male or female, look at that person as a dead body. And don't forget to see yourself as a dead body. Eventually this is all that's left. Try to develop this way of seeing as thoroughly as you can. Train with it until it increasingly becomes part and parcel of your mind. I promise it's great fun - if you actually do it. But if you are preoccupied with reading about it in books, you'll have a difficult time of it. You've got to do it. And do it with utmost sincerity. Do it until this meditation becomes a part of you. Make realization of truth your aim. If you're motivated by the desire to transcend suffering, then you'll be on the right path.

These days there are many people teaching vipassanā and a wide range of meditation techniques. I'll say this: doing vipassanā is not easy. We can't just jump straight into it. It won't work if it's not proceeding from a high standard of morality. Find out for yourself. Moral discipline and training precepts are necessary, because if our behaviour, actions and speech aren't impeccable, we'll never be able to stand on our own two feet. Meditation without virtue is like trying to skip over an essential section of the Path. Similarly, occasionally you hear people say, 'You don't need to develop tranquillity. Skip over it and go straight into the insight meditation of vipassanā.' Sloppy people who like to cut corners say things like this. They say you don't have to bother with moral discipline. Upholding and refining your virtue is challenging, not just playing around. If we could skip over all the teachings on ethical behaviour, we'd have it pretty easy, wouldn't we? Whenever we'd encounter a difficulty, we just avoid it by skipping over it. Of course, we'd all like to skip over the difficult bits.

There was once a monk I met who told me he was a real meditator. He asked for permission to stay with me here and enquired about the schedule and standard of monastic discipline. I explained to him that in this monastery we live according to the Vinaya, the Buddha's code of monastic discipline, and if

he wanted to come and train with me he'd have to renounce his money and private supplies of goods. He told me his practice was 'non-attachment to all conventions'. I told him I didn't know what he was talking about. 'How about if I stay here,' he asked, 'and keep all my money but don't attach to it. Money's just a convention.' I said sure, no problem. 'If you can eat salt and not find it salty, then you can use money and not be attached to it.' He was just speaking gibberish. Actually he was just too lazy to follow the details of the Vinaya. I'm telling you, it's difficult. 'When you can eat salt and honestly assure me it's not salty, then I'll take you seriously. And if you tell me it's not salty then I'll give you a whole sack to eat. Just try it. Will it really not taste salty? Non-attachment to conventions isn't just a matter of clever speech. If you're going to talk like this, you can't stay with me.' So he left.

We have to try and maintain the practice of virtue. Monastics should train by experimenting with the ascetic practices (*dhutanga*), while laypeople practising at home should keep the Five Precepts. Attempt to attain impeccability in everything said and done. We should cultivate goodness to the best of our ability, and keep on gradually doing it.

When starting to cultivate the serenity of samatha meditation, don't make the mistake of trying once or twice and then giving up because the mind is not peaceful. That's not the right way. You have to cultivate meditation over a long period of time. Why does it have to take so long? Think about it. How many years have we allowed our minds to wander astray? How many years have we not been doing samatha meditation? Whenever the mind has ordered us to follow it down a particular path, we've rushed after it. To calm that wandering mind, to bring it to a stop, to make it still, a couple of months of meditation won't be enough. Consider this.

When we undertake to train the mind to be at peace with every situation, please understand that in the beginning when a defiled emotion comes up, the mind won't be peaceful. It's going to be distracted and out of control. Why? Because there's craving. We don't want our mind to think. We don't want to experience any distracting moods or emotions. Not wanting is craving, the craving for non-existence. The more we crave not to experience certain things, the more we invite and usher them in. 'I don't want these things, so why do they keep coming to me? I wish it wasn't this way, so why is it this way?' There we go! We crave for things to exist in a particular way, because we don't understand our own mind. It can take an incredibly long time before we realize that playing around with these things is a mistake. Finally, when we consider it clearly we see, 'Oh, these things come because I call them.'

Craving not to experience something, craving to be at peace, craving not to be distracted and agitated - it's all craving. It's all a red-hot chunk of iron. But

never mind. Just get on with the practice. Whenever we experience a mood or emotion, examine it in terms of its impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and selfless qualities, and toss it into one of these three categories. Then reflect and investigate: these defiled emotions are almost always accompanied by excessive thinking. Wherever a mood leads, thinking straggles along behind. Thinking and wisdom are two very different things. Thinking merely reacts to and follows our moods, and thoughts carry on with no end in sight. But if wisdom is operating, it will bring the mind to stillness. The mind stops and doesn't go anywhere. There's simply knowing and acknowledging what's being experienced. When this emotion comes, the mind's like this; when that mood comes, it's like that. We sustain the 'knowing'. Eventually it occurs to us, 'Hey, all this thinking, this aimless mental chatter, this worrying and judging - it's all insubstantial nonsense. It's all impermanent, unsatisfactory and not me or mine.' Toss it into one of these three all-encompassing categories, and quell the uprising. You cut it off at its source. Later when we again sit meditation, it will come up again. Keep a close watch on it. Spy on it.

It's just like raising water buffaloes. You've got the farmer, some rice plants, and the water buffalo. Now the water buffalo wants to eat those rice plants. Rice plants are what water buffaloes like to eat, right? Your mind is a water buffalo. Defiled emotions are like the rice plants. The knowing is the farmer. Dhamma practice is just like this. No different. Compare it for yourself. When tending a water buffalo, what do you do? You release it, allowing it to wander freely, but you keep a close eye on it. If it strays too close to the rice plants, you yell out. When the buffalo hears, it backs away. Don't be inattentive, oblivious to what the buffalo is doing. If you've got a stubborn water buffalo that won't heed your warning, take a stick and give it a stout whack on the backside. Then it won't dare go near the rice plants. Don't get caught taking a siesta. If you lie down and doze off, those rice plants will be history. Dhamma practice is the same: you watch over your mind; the knowing tends the mind.

'Those people who keep a close watch over their minds will be liberated from Māra's snare.' And yet this knowing mind is also the mind, so who's the one observing the mind? Such ideas can make you extremely confused. The mind is one thing, the knowing another; and yet the knowing originates in this very same mind. What does it mean to know the mind? What's it like to encounter moods and emotions? What's it like to be without any defiled emotions whatsoever? That which knows what these things are is what is meant by the 'knowing'. The knowing observantly follows the mind, and it's from this knowing that wisdom is born. The mind is that which thinks and gets entangled in emotions, one after another - precisely like our water buffalo. Whatever directions it strays in, maintain a watchful eye. How could it get

away? If it starts to drift over towards the rice plants, yell out. If it won't listen, pick up a stick and stride over to it. *'Whack!'* This is how you frustrate craving.

Training the mind is no different. When the mind experiences an emotion and instantly grabs it, it's the job of the knowing to teach. Examine the mood to see if it's good or bad. Explain to the mind how cause and effect functions. And when it again grabs onto something that it thinks is adorable, the knowing has to again teach the mind, again explain cause and effect, until the mind is able to cast that thing aside. This leads to peace of mind. After finding out that whatever it grabs and grasps is inherently undesirable, the mind simply stops. It can't be bothered with those things anymore, because it's come under a constant barrage of rebukes and reprimands. Thwart the craving of the mind with determination. Challenge it to its core, until the teachings penetrate to the heart. That's how you train the mind.

Since the time when I withdrew to the forest to practise meditation, I've been practising like this. When I train my disciples, I train them to practise like this, because I want them to see the truth, rather than just read what's in the scriptures; I want them to see if their hearts have been liberated from conceptual thinking. When liberation occurs, you know; and when liberation has not yet happened, then contemplate the process of how one thing causes and leads to another. Contemplate until you know and understand it through and through. Once it's been penetrated with insight, it will fall away on its own. When something comes your way and gets stuck, investigate it. Don't give up until it has released its grip. Repeatedly investigate right here. Personally, this is how I approached the training, because the Buddha taught that you have to know for yourself. All sages know the truth for themselves. You've got to discover it in the depths of your own heart. Know yourself.

If you are confident in what you know and trust yourself, you will feel relaxed whether others criticize or praise you. Whatever other people say, you're at ease. Why? Because you know yourself. If someone bolsters you with praise, but you know you're not actually worthy of it, are you really going to believe them? Of course not. You just carry on with your Dhamma practice. When people who aren't confident in what they know get praised by others, they get sucked into believing it and it warps their perception. Likewise when someone criticizes you, take a look at and examine yourself. 'No, what they say isn't true. They accuse me of being wrong, but actually I'm not. Their accusation isn't valid.' If that's the case, what would be the point of getting angry with them? Their words aren't true. If, however, we are at fault just as they accuse, then their criticism is correct. If that's the case, what would be the point of getting angry with them? When you're able to think like this, life

is truly untroubled and comfortable. Nothing that then happens is wrong. Then everything is Dhamma. That is how I practised.

Following the Middle Path

It's the shortest and most direct path. You can come and argue with me on points of Dhamma, but I won't join in. Rather than argue back, I'd just offer some reflections for you to consider. Please understand what the Buddha taught: let go of everything. Let go with knowing and awareness. Without knowing and awareness, the letting go is no different than that of cows and water buffaloes. Without putting your heart into it, the letting go isn't correct. You let go because you understand conventional reality. This is non-attachment. The Buddha taught that in the beginning stages of Dhamma practice you should work very hard, develop things thoroughly and attach a lot. Attach to the Buddha. Attach to the Dhamma. Attach to the Sangha. Attach firmly and deeply. That's what the Buddha taught. Attach with sincerity and persistence and hold on tight.

In my own search I tried nearly every possible means of contemplation. I sacrificed my life for the Dhamma, because I had faith in the reality of enlightenment and the Path to get there. These things actually do exist, just like the Buddha said they did. But to realize them takes practice, right practice. It takes pushing yourself to the limit. It takes the courage to train, to reflect, and to fundamentally change. It takes the courage to actually do what it takes. And how do you do it? Train the heart. The thoughts in our heads tell us to go in one direction, but the Buddha tells us to go in another. Why is it necessary to train? Because the heart is totally encrusted with and plastered over with defilements. That's what a heart is like that has not yet been transformed through the training. It's unreliable, so don't believe it. It's not yet virtuous. How can we trust a heart that lacks purity and clarity? Therefore, the Buddha warned us not to put our trust in a defiled heart. Initially the heart is only the hired hand of defilement, but if they associate together for an extended period of time, the heart is distorted to become defilement itself. That's why the Buddha taught us not to trust our hearts.

If we take a good look at our monastic training discipline, we'll see that the whole thing is about training the heart. And whenever we train the heart we feel hot and bothered. As soon as we're hot and bothered we start to complain, 'Boy, this practice is incredibly difficult! It's impossible.' But the Buddha didn't think like that. He considered that when the training was causing us heat and friction, that meant we were on the right track. We don't think that way. We think it's a sign that something is wrong. This misunderstanding is what makes the practice seem so arduous. In the beginning we feel hot and bothered, so we think we're off track. Everyone

wants to feel good, but they're less concerned about whether it's right or not. When we go against the grain of the defilements and challenge our cravings, of course we feel suffering. We get hot, upset, and bothered and then quit. We think we're on the wrong path. The Buddha, however, would say we're getting it right. We're confronting our defilements, and they are what is getting hot and bothered. But we think it's us who are hot and bothered. The Buddha taught that it's the defilements that get stirred up and upset. It's the same for everyone.

That's why Dhamma practice is so demanding. People don't examine things clearly. Generally, they lose the Path on either the side of self-indulgence or self-torment. They get stuck in these two extremes. On one hand they like to indulge their heart's desires. Whatever they feel like doing they just do it. They like to sit in comfort. They love to lie down and stretch out in comfort. Whatever they do, they seek to do it in comfort. This is what I mean by self-indulgence: clinging to feeling good. With such indulgence how could Dhamma practice possibly progress?

If we can no longer indulge in comfort, sensuality and feeling good, we become irritated. We get upset and angry and suffer because of it. This is falling off the Path on the side of self-torment. This is not the path of a peaceful sage, not the way of someone who's still. The Buddha warned not to stray down these two sidetracks of self-indulgence and self-torment. When experiencing pleasure, just know that with awareness. When experiencing anger, ill-will, and irritation, understand that you are not following in the footsteps of the Buddha. Those aren't the paths of people seeking peace, but the roads of common villagers. A monk at peace doesn't walk down those roads. He strides straight down the middle with self-indulgence on the left and self-torment on the right. This is correct Dhamma practice.

If you're going to take up this monastic training, you have to walk this Middle Way, not getting worked up about either happiness or unhappiness. Set them down. But it feels like they're kicking us around. First they kick us from one side, 'Ow!', then they kick us from the other, 'Ow!' We feel like the clapper in our wooden bell, knocked back and forth from side to side. The Middle Way is all about letting go of happiness and unhappiness, and the right practice is the practice in the middle. When the craving for happiness hits and we don't satisfy it, we feel the pain.

Walking down the Middle Path of the Buddha is arduous and challenging. There are just these two extremes of good and bad. If we believe what they tell us, we have to follow their orders. If we become enraged at someone, we immediately go searching for a stick to attack them. We have no patient endurance. If we love someone we want to caress them from head to toe. Am

I right? These two sidetracks completely miss the middle. This is not what the Buddha recommended. His teaching was to gradually put these things down. His practice was a path leading out of existence, away from rebirth - a path free of becoming, birth, happiness, unhappiness, good, and evil.

Those people who crave existence are blind to what's in the middle. They fall off the Path on the side of happiness and then completely pass over the middle on their way to the other side of dissatisfaction and irritation. They continually skip over the centre. This sacred place is invisible to them as they rush back and forth. They don't stay in that place where there is no existence and no birth. They don't like it, so they don't stay. Either they go down out of their home and get bitten by a dog or fly up to get pecked by a vulture. This is existence.

Humanity is blind to that which is free from existence with no rebirth. The human heart is blind to it, so it repeatedly passes it by and skips it over. The Middle Way walked by the Buddha, the Path of correct Dhamma practice, transcends existence and rebirth. The mind that is beyond both the wholesome and the unwholesome is released. This is the path of a peaceful sage. If we don't walk it we'll never be a sage at peace. That peace will never have a chance to bloom. Why? Because of existence and rebirth. Because there's birth and death. The path of the Buddha is without birth or death. There's no low and no high. There's no happiness and no suffering. There's no good and no evil. This is the straight path. This is the path of peace and stillness. It's peacefully free of pleasure and pain, happiness and sorrow. This is how to practise Dhamma. Experiencing this, the mind can stop. It can stop asking questions. There's no longer any need to search for answers. There! That's why the Buddha said that the Dhamma is something that the wise know directly for themselves. No need to ask anybody. We understand clearly for ourselves without a shred of doubt that things are exactly as the Buddha said they were.

Dedication to the Practice

So I've told you a few brief stories about how I practised. I didn't have a lot of knowledge. I didn't study much. What I did study was this heart and mind of mine, and I learned in a natural way through experimentation, trial and error. When I liked something, then I examined what was going on and where it would lead. Inevitably, it would drag me to some distant suffering. My practice was to observe myself. As understanding and insight deepened, gradually I came to know myself.

Practise with unflinching dedication! If you want to practise Dhamma, then please try not to think too much. If you're meditating and you find yourself trying to force specific results, then it's better to stop. When your mind settles

down to become peaceful and then you think, 'That's it! That's it, isn't it? Is this it?', then stop. Take all your analytical and theoretical knowledge, wrap it up and store it away in a chest. And don't drag it out for discussion or to teach. That's not the type of knowledge that penetrates inside. They are different types of knowledge.

When the reality of something is seen, it's not the same as the written descriptions. For example, let's say we write down the word 'sensual desire'. When sensual desire actually overwhelms the heart, it's impossible that the written word can convey the same meaning as the reality. It's the same with 'anger'. We can write the letters on a blackboard, but when we're actually angry the experience is not the same. We can't read those letters fast enough, and the heart is engulfed by rage.

This is an extremely important point. The theoretical teachings are accurate, but it's essential to bring them into our hearts. It must be internalized. If the Dhamma isn't brought into the heart, it's not truly known. It's not actually seen. I was no different. I didn't study extensively, but I did do enough to pass some of the exams on Buddhist theory. One day I had the opportunity to listen to a Dhamma talk from a meditation master. As I listened, some disrespectful thoughts came up. I didn't know how to listen to a real Dhamma talk. I couldn't figure out what this wandering meditation monk was talking about. He was teaching as though it was coming from his own direct experience, as if he was after the truth.

As time went on and I gained some first-hand experience in the practice, I saw for myself the truth of what that monk taught. I understood how to understand. Insight then followed in its wake. Dhamma was taking root in my own heart and mind. It was a long, long time before I realized that everything that that wandering monk had taught came from what he'd seen for himself. The Dhamma he taught came directly from his own experience, not from a book. He spoke according to his understanding and insight. When I walked the Path myself, I came across every detail he'd described and had to admit he was right. So I continued on.

Try to take every opportunity you can to put effort into Dhamma practice. Whether it's peaceful or not, don't worry about it at this point. The highest priority is to set the wheels of practice in motion and create the causes for future liberation. If you've done the work, there's no need to worry about the results. Don't be anxious that you won't gain results. Anxiety is not peaceful. If however, you don't do the work, how can you expect results? How can you ever hope to see? The one who searches discovers. The one who eats is full. Everything around us lies to us. Recognizing this even ten times is still pretty good. But the same old coot keeps telling us the same old lies and stories. If

we know he's lying, it's not so bad, but it can be an exceedingly long time before we know. The old fellow comes and tries to hoodwink us with deception time and time again.

Practising Dhamma means upholding virtue, developing samādhi and cultivating wisdom in our hearts. Remember and reflect on the Triple Gem: the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. Abandon absolutely everything without exception. Our own actions are the causes and conditions that will ripen in this very life. So strive on with sincerity.

Even if we have to sit in a chair to meditate, it's still possible to focus our attention. In the beginning we don't have to focus on many things - just our breath. If we prefer, we can mentally repeat the words 'Buddha', 'Dhamma', or 'Sangha' in conjunction with each breath. While focusing attention, resolve not to control the breath. If breathing seems laborious or uncomfortable, this indicates we're not approaching it right. As long as we're not yet at ease with the breath, it will seem too shallow or too deep, too subtle or too rough. However, once we relax with our breath, finding it pleasant and comfortable, clearly aware of each inhalation and exhalation, then we're getting the hang of it. If we're not doing it properly we will lose the breath. If this happens then it's better to stop for a moment and refocus the mindfulness.

If while meditating you get the urge to experience psychic phenomena or the mind becomes luminous and radiant or you have visions of celestial palaces, etc., there's no need to fear. Simply be aware of whatever you're experiencing, and continue on meditating. Occasionally, after some time, the breath may appear to slow to a halt. The sensation of the breath seems to vanish and you become alarmed. Don't worry, there's nothing to be afraid of. You only think your breathing has stopped. Actually the breath is still there, but it's functioning on a much more subtle level than usual. With time the breath will return to normal by itself.

In the beginning, just concentrate on making the mind calm and peaceful. Whether sitting in a chair, riding in a car, taking a boat ride, or wherever you happen to be, you should be proficient enough in your meditation that you can enter a state of peace at will. When you get on a train and sit down, quickly bring your mind to a state of peace. Wherever you are, you can always sit. This level of proficiency indicates that you're becoming familiar with the Path. You then investigate. Utilize the power of this peaceful mind to investigate what you experience.

At times it's what you see; at times what you hear, smell, taste, feel with your body, or think and feel in your heart. Whatever sensory experience presents itself - whether you like it or not - take that up for contemplation. Simply know what you are experiencing. Don't project meaning or interpretations

onto those objects of sense awareness. If it's good, just know that it's good. If it's bad, just know that it's bad. This is conventional reality. Good or evil, it's all impermanent, unsatisfying and not-self. It's all undependable. None of it is worthy of being grasped or clung to.

If you can maintain this practice of peace and inquiry, wisdom will automatically be generated. Everything sensed and experienced then falls into these three pits of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. This is vipassanā meditation. The mind is already peaceful, and whenever impure states of mind surface, throw them away into one of these three rubbish pits. This is the essence of vipassanā: discarding everything into impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. Good, bad, horrible, or whatever, toss it down. In a short time, understanding and insight - feeble insight, that is, will blossom forth in the midst of the three universal characteristics.

At this beginning stage the wisdom is still weak and feeble, but try to maintain this practice with consistency. It's difficult to put into words, but it's like if somebody wanted to get to know me, they'd have to come and live here. Eventually with daily contact we would get to know each other.

Respect the Tradition

It's high time we started to meditate. Meditate to understand, to abandon, to relinquish, and to be at peace.

I used to be a wandering monk. I'd travel by foot to visit teachers and seek solitude. I didn't go around giving Dhamma talks. I went to listen to the Dhamma talks of the great Buddhist masters of the time. I didn't go to teach them. I listened to whatever advice they had to offer. Even when young or junior monks tried to tell me what the Dhamma was, I listened patiently. However, I rarely got into discussions about the Dhamma. I couldn't see the point in getting involved in lengthy discussions. Whatever teachings I accepted I took on board straight away, directly where they pointed to renunciation and letting go. What I did, I did for renunciation and letting go. We don't have to become experts in the scriptures. We're getting older with every day that passes, and every day we pounce on a mirage, missing the real thing. Practising the Dhamma is something quite different from studying it.

I don't criticize any of the wide variety of meditation styles and techniques. As long as we understand their true purpose and meaning, they're not wrong. However, calling ourselves Buddhist meditators, but not strictly following the monastic code of discipline (Vinaya) will, in my opinion, never meet with success. Why? Because we try to bypass a vital section of the Path. Skipping over virtue, samādhi or wisdom won't work. Some people may tell you not to get attached to the serenity of samatha meditation: 'Don't bother with

samatha; advance straight to the wisdom and insight practices of vipassanā.’ As I see it, if we attempt to detour straight to vipassanā, we’ll find it impossible to successfully complete the journey.

Don’t forsake the style of practice and meditation techniques of the eminent forest masters, such as the Venerable Ajahns Sao, Mun, Taungrut, and Upāli. The path they taught is utterly reliable and true - if we do it the way they did. If we follow in their footsteps, we’ll gain true insight into ourselves. Ajahn Sao cared for his virtue impeccably. He didn’t say we should bypass it. If these great masters of the forest tradition recommended practising meditation and monastic etiquette in a particular way, then out of deep respect for them we should follow what they taught. If they said to do it, then do it. If they said to stop because it’s wrong, then stop. We do it out of faith. We do it with unwavering sincerity and determination. We do it until we see the Dhamma in our own hearts, until we *are* the Dhamma. This is what the forest masters taught. Their disciples consequently developed profound respect, awe and affection for them, because it was through following their path, that they saw what their teachers saw.

Give it a try. Do it just like I say. If you actually do it, you’ll see the Dhamma, be the Dhamma. If you actually undertake the search, what would stop you? The defilements of the mind will be vanquished if you approach them with the right strategy: be someone who renounces, one who is frugal with words, who is content with little, and who abandons all views and opinions stemming from self-importance and conceit. You will then be able to listen patiently to anyone, even if what they’re saying is wrong. You will also be able to listen patiently to people when they’re right. Examine yourself in this way. I assure you, it’s possible, if you try. Scholars however, rarely come and put the Dhamma into practice. There are some, but they are few. It’s a shame. The fact that you’ve made it this far and have come to visit is already worthy of praise. It shows inner strength. Some monasteries only encourage studying. The monks study and study, on and on, with no end in sight, and never cut that which needs to be cut. They only study the word ‘peace’. But if you can stop still, you’ll discover something of real value. This is how you do research. This research is truly valuable and completely immobile. It goes straight to what you’ve been reading about. If scholars don’t practise meditation however, their knowledge has little understanding. Once they put the teachings into practice, those things which they have studied about then become vivid and clear.

So start practising! Develop this type of understanding. Give living in the forest a try, come and stay in one of these tiny huts. Trying out this training for a while and testing it for yourself would be of far greater value than just

reading books. Then you can have discussions with yourself. While observing the mind it's as if it lets go and rests in its natural state. When it ripples and wavers from this still, natural state in the form of thoughts and concepts, the conditioning process of *sankhāra* is set in motion. Be very careful and keep a watchful eye on this process of conditioning. Once it moves and is dislodged from this natural state, Dhamma practice is no longer on the right track. It steps off into either self-indulgence or self-torment. Right there. That's what gives rise to this web of mental conditioning. If the state of mind is a good one, this creates positive conditioning. If it's bad, the conditioning is negative. These originate in your own mind.

I'm telling you, it's great fun to observe closely how the mind works. I could happily talk about this one subject the whole day. When you get to know the ways of the mind, you'll see how this process functions and how it's kept going through being brainwashed by the mind's impurities. I see the mind as merely a single point. Psychological states are guests who come to visit this spot. Sometimes this person comes to call; sometimes that person pays a visit. They come to the visitor centre. Train the mind to watch and know them all with the eyes of alert awareness. This is how you care for your heart and mind. Whenever a visitor approaches you wave them away. If you allow them to enter, where are they going to sit down? There's only one seat, and you're sitting in it. Spend the whole day in this one spot.

This is the Buddha's firm and unshakeable awareness that watches over and protects the mind. You're sitting right here. Since the moment you emerged from the womb, every visitor that's ever come to call has arrived right here. No matter how often they come, they always come to this same spot, right here. Knowing them all, the Buddha's awareness sits alone, firm and unshakeable. Those visitors journey here seeking to exert influence, to condition and sway your mind in various ways. When they succeed in getting the mind entangled in their issues, psychological states arise. Whatever the issue is, wherever it seems to be leading, just forget it - it doesn't matter. Simply know who the guests are as they arrive. Once they've dropped by they will find that there's only one chair, and as long as you're occupying it they will have nowhere to sit down. They come thinking to fill your ear with gossip, but this time there's no room for them to sit. Next time they come there will also be no chair free. No matter how many times these chattering visitors show up, they always meet the same fellow sitting in the same spot. You haven't budged from that chair. How long do you think they will continue to put up with this situation? In just speaking to them you get to know them thoroughly. Everyone and everything you've ever known since you began to experience the world will come for a visit. Simply observing and being aware right here is enough to see the Dhamma entirely. You

discuss, observe and contemplate by yourself.

This is how to discuss Dhamma. I don't know how to talk about anything else. I can continue on speaking in this fashion, but in the end it's nothing but talking and listening. I'd recommend you actually go and do the practice.

Mastering the Meditation

If you have a look for yourself, you'll encounter certain experiences. There's a Path to guide you and offer directions. As you carry on, the situation changes and you have to adjust your approach to remedy the problems that come up. It can be a long time before you see a clear signpost. If you're going to walk the same Path as I did, the journey definitely has to take place in your own heart. If not, you'll encounter numerous obstacles.

It's just like hearing a sound. The hearing is one thing, the sound another, and we are consciously aware of both without compounding the event. We rely on nature to provide the raw material for the investigation in search of Truth. Eventually the mind dissects and separates phenomena on its own. Simply put, the mind doesn't get involved. When the ears pick up a sound, observe what happens in the heart and mind. Do they get bound up, entangled, and carried away by it? Do they get irritated? At least know this much. When a sound then registers, it won't disturb the mind. Being here, we take up those things close at hand rather than those far away. Even if we'd like to flee from sound, there's no escape. The only escape possible is through training the mind to be unwavering in the face of sound. Set sound down. The sounds we let go of we can still hear. We hear but we let sound go, because we've already set it down. It's not that we have to forcefully separate the hearing and the sound. It separates automatically due to abandoning and letting go. Even if we then wanted to cling to a sound, the mind wouldn't cling. Because once we understand the true nature of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and all the rest, and the heart sees with clear insight, everything sensed without exception falls within the domain of the universal characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self.

Whenever we hear a sound it's understood in terms of these universal characteristics. Whenever there's sense contact with the ear, we hear but it's as if we didn't hear. This doesn't mean the mind no longer functions. Mindfulness and the mind intertwine and merge to monitor each other at all times without a lapse. When the mind is trained to this level, no matter what path we then choose to walk we will be doing research. We will be cultivating the analysis of phenomena, one of the essential factors of enlightenment, and this analysis will keep rolling on with its own momentum.

Discuss Dhamma with yourself. Unravel and release feeling, memory,

perception, thinking, intentions, and consciousness. Nothing will be able to touch them as they continue to perform their functions on their own. For people who have mastered their minds, this process of reflection and investigation flows along automatically. It's no longer necessary to direct it intentionally. Whatever sphere the mind inclines towards, the contemplation is immediately adept.

If Dhamma practice reaches this level, there's another interesting side benefit. While asleep, snoring, talking in our sleep, gnashing our teeth, and tossing and turning will all stop. Even if we've been resting in deep sleep, when we wake up we won't be drowsy. We'll feel energized and alert as if we'd been awake the whole time. I used to snore, but once the mind remained awake at all times, snoring stopped. How can you snore when you're awake? It's only the body that stops and sleeps. The mind is wide awake day and night, around the clock. This is the pure and heightened awareness of the Buddha: the One Who Knows, the Awakened One, the Joyous One, the Brilliantly Radiant One. This clear awareness never sleeps. Its energy is self-sustaining, and it never gets dull or sleepy. At this stage we can go without rest for two or three days. When the body begins to show signs of exhaustion, we sit down to meditate and immediately enter deep samādhi for five or ten minutes. When we come out of that state, we feel fresh and invigorated as if we've had a full night's sleep. If we're beyond concern for the body, sleep is of minimal importance. We take appropriate measures to care for the body, but we aren't anxious about its physical condition. Let it follow its natural laws. We don't have to tell the body what to do. It tells itself. It's as if someone is prodding us, urging us to strive on in our efforts. Even if we feel lazy, there's a voice inside that constantly rouses our diligence. Stagnation at this point is impossible, because effort and progress have gathered an unstoppable momentum. Please check this out for yourself. You've been studying and learning a long time. Now it's time to study and learn about yourself.

In the beginning stages of Dhamma practice, physical seclusion is of vital importance. When you live alone in isolation you will recall the words of Venerable Sāriputta: 'Physical seclusion is a cause and condition for the arising of mental seclusion, states of profound samādhi free from external sense contact. This seclusion of the mind is in turn a cause and condition for seclusion from mental defilements, enlightenment.' And yet some people still say that seclusion is not important: 'If your heart is peaceful, it doesn't matter where you are.' It's true, but in the beginning stages we should remember that physical seclusion in a suitable environment comes first. Today, or sometime soon, seek out a lonely cremation ground in a remote forest far from any habitation. Experiment with living all alone. Or seek out a fear-inspiring mountain peak. Go off and live alone, okay? You'll have lots of fun all night

long. Only then will you know for yourself. Even I once thought that physical seclusion wasn't particularly important. That's what I thought, but once I actually got out there and did it, I reflected on what the Buddha taught. The Blessed One encouraged his disciples to practise in remote locations far removed from society. In the beginning this builds a foundation for internal seclusion of the mind which then supports the unshakeable seclusion from defilements.

For example, say you're a lay person with a home and a family. What seclusion do you get? When you return home, as soon as you step inside the front door you get hit with chaos and complication. There's no physical seclusion. So you slip away for a retreat in a remote environment and the atmosphere is completely different. It's necessary to comprehend the importance of physical isolation and solitude in the initial stages of Dhamma practice. You then seek out a meditation master for instruction. He or she guides, advises and points out those areas where your understanding is wrong, because it's precisely where you misunderstand that you think you are right. Right where you're wrong, you're sure you're right. Once the teacher explains, you understand what is wrong, and right where the teacher says you're wrong is precisely where you thought you were right.

From what I've heard, there are a number of Buddhist scholar monks who search and research in accordance with the scriptures. There's no reason why we shouldn't experiment. When it's time to open our books and study, we learn in that style. But when it's time to take up arms and engage in combat, we have to fight in a style that may not correspond with the theory. If a warrior enters battle and fights according to what he's read, he'll be no match for his opponent. When the warrior is sincere and the fight is real, he has to battle in a style that goes beyond theory. That's how it is. The Buddha's words in the scriptures are only guidelines and examples to follow, and studying can sometimes lead to carelessness.

The way of the forest masters is the way of renunciation. On this Path there's only abandoning. We uproot views stemming from self-importance. We uproot the very essence of our sense of self. I assure you, this practice will challenge you to the core, but no matter how difficult it is don't discard the forest masters and their teachings. Without proper guidance the mind and samādhi are potentially very deluding. Things which shouldn't be possible begin to happen. I've always approached such phenomena with caution and care. When I was a young monk, just starting out in practice during my first few years, I couldn't yet trust my mind. However, once I'd gained considerable experience and could fully trust the workings of my mind, nothing could pose a problem. Even if unusual phenomena manifested, I'd

just leave it at that. If we are clued in to how these things work, they cease by themselves. It's all fuel for wisdom. As time goes on we find ourselves completely at ease.

In meditation, things which usually aren't wrong can be wrong. For example, we sit down cross-legged with determination and resolve: 'All right! No pussyfooting around this time. I will concentrate the mind. Just watch me.' No way that approach will work! Everytime I tried that my meditation got nowhere. But we love the bravado. From what I've observed, meditation will develop at its own rate. Many evenings as I sat down to meditate I thought to myself, 'All right! Tonight I won't budge from this spot until at least 1:00 am.' Even with this thought I was already making some bad kamma, because it wasn't long before the pain in my body attacked from all sides, overwhelming me until it felt as though I was going to die. However, those occasions when the meditation went well were times when I didn't place any limits on the sitting. I didn't set a goal of 7:00, 8:00, 9:00 or whatever, but simply kept sitting, steadily carrying on, letting go with equanimity. Don't force the meditation. Don't attempt to interpret what's happening. Don't coerce your heart with unrealistic demands that it enter a state of samādhi - or else you'll find it even more agitated and unpredictable than normal. Just allow the heart and mind to relax, be comfortable and at ease.

Allow the breathing to flow easily at just the right pace, neither too short nor too long. Don't try to make it into anything special. Let the body relax, comfortable and at ease. Then keep doing it. Your mind will ask you, 'How late are we going to meditate tonight? What time are we going to quit?' It incessantly nags, so you have to bellow out a reprimand, 'Listen buddy, just leave me alone.' This busybody questioner needs to be regularly subdued, because it's nothing other than defilement coming to annoy you. Don't pay it any attention whatsoever. You have to be tough with it. 'Whether I call it quits early or have a late night, it's none of your damn business! If I want to sit all night, it doesn't make any difference to anyone, so why do you come and stick your nose into my meditation?' You have to cut the nosy fellow off like that. You can then carry on meditating for as long as you wish, according to what feels right.

As you allow the mind to relax and be at ease, it becomes peaceful. Experiencing this, you'll recognize and appreciate the power of clinging. When you can sit on and on, for a very long time, going past midnight, comfortable and relaxed, you'll know you're getting the hang of meditation. You'll understand how attachment and clinging really do defile the mind.

When some people sit down to meditate they light a stick of incense in front of them and vow, 'I won't get up until this stick of incense has burned down.'

Then they sit. After what seems like an hour they open their eyes and realize only five minutes have gone by. They stare at the incense, disappointed at how exceedingly long the stick still is. They close their eyes again and continue. Soon their eyes are open once more to check that stick of incense. These people don't get anywhere in meditation. Don't do it like that. Just sitting and dreaming about that stick of incense, 'I wonder if it's almost finished burning,' the meditation gets nowhere. Don't give importance to such things. The mind doesn't have to do anything special.

If you are going to undertake the task of developing the mind in meditation, don't let the defilement of craving know the ground rules or the goal. 'How will you meditate, Venerable?,' it inquires. 'How much will you do? How late are you thinking of going?' Craving keeps pestering until we submit to an agreement. Once we declare we're going to sit until midnight, it immediately begins to hassle us. Before even an hour has passed we're feeling so restless and impatient that we can't continue. Then more hindrances attack as we berate ourselves, 'Hopeless! What, is sitting going to kill you? You said you were going to make your mind unshakeable in samādhi, but it's still unreliable and all over the place. You made a vow and you didn't keep it.' Thoughts of self-depreciation and dejection assail our minds, and we sink into self-hatred. There's no one else to blame or get angry at, and that makes it all the worse. Once we make a vow we have to keep it. We either fulfil it or die in the process. If we do vow to sit for a certain length of time, we shouldn't break that vow and stop. In the meantime however, just gradually practise and develop. There's no need for making dramatic vows. Try to steadily and persistently train the mind. Occasionally, the meditation will be peaceful, and all the aches and discomfort in the body will vanish. The pain in the ankles and knees will cease by itself.

Once we try our hand at cultivating meditation, if strange images, visions or sensory perceptions start coming up, the first thing to do is to check our state of mind. Don't discard this basic principle. For such images to arise the mind has to be relatively peaceful. Don't crave for them to appear, and don't crave for them not to appear. If they do arise examine them, but don't allow them to delude. Just remember they're not ours. They are impermanent, unsatisfying and not-self just like everything else. Even if they are real, don't dwell on or pay much attention to them. If they stubbornly refuse to fade, then refocus your awareness on your breath with increased vigour. Take at least three long, deep breaths and each time slowly exhale completely. This may do the trick. Keep re-focusing the attention.

Don't become possessive of such phenomena. They are nothing more than what they are, and what they are is potentially deluding. Either we like them

and fall in love with them or the mind becomes poisoned with fear. They're unreliable: they may not be true or what they appear to be. If you experience them, don't try to interpret their meaning or project meaning onto them. Remember they're not ours, so don't run after these visions or sensations. Instead, immediately go back and check the present state of mind. This is our rule of thumb. If we abandon this basic principle and become drawn into what we believe we are seeing, we can forget ourselves and start babbling or even go insane. We may lose our marbles to the point where we can't even relate to other people on a normal level. Place your trust in your own heart. Whatever happens, simply carry on observing the heart and mind. Strange meditative experiences can be beneficial for people with wisdom, but dangerous for those without. Whatever occurs don't become elated or alarmed. If experiences happen, they happen.

Another way to approach Dhamma practice is to contemplate and examine everything we see, do, and experience. Never discard the meditation. When some people finish sitting or walking meditation they think it's time to stop and rest. They stop focusing their minds on their object of meditation or theme of contemplation. They completely drop it. Don't practise like that. Whatever you see, inquire into what it really is. Contemplate the good people in the world. Contemplate the evil ones too. Take a penetrating look at the rich and powerful; the destitute and poverty-stricken. When you see a child, an elderly person or a young man or woman, investigate the meaning of age. Everything is fuel for inquiry. This is how you cultivate the mind.

The contemplation that leads to the Dhamma is the contemplation of conditionality, the process of cause and effect, in all its various manifestations: major and minor, black and white, good and bad. In short, everything. When you think, recognize it as a thought and contemplate that it's merely that, nothing more. All these things wind up in the graveyard of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self, so don't possessively cling to any of them. This is the cremation ground of all phenomena. Bury and cremate them in order to experience the Truth.

Having insight into impermanence means not allowing ourselves to suffer. It's a matter of investigating with wisdom. For example, we obtain something we consider good or pleasurable, and so we're happy. Take a close and sustained look at this goodness and pleasure. Sometimes after having it for a long time we get fed up with it. We want to give it away or sell it. If there's nobody who wants to buy it, we're ready to throw it away. Why? What are the reasons underlying this dynamic? Everything is impermanent, inconstant, and changing, that's why. If we can't sell it or even throw it away, we start to suffer. This entire issue is just like that, and once one incident is fully

understood, no matter how many more similar situations arise, they are all understood to be just the same. That's simply the way things are. As the saying goes, 'If you've seen one, you've seen them all.'

Occasionally we see things we don't like. At times we hear annoying or unpleasant noises and get irritated. Examine this and remember it, because some time in the future we might like those noises. We might actually delight in those very same things we once detested. It's possible! Then it occurs to us with clarity and insight, 'Aha! All things are impermanent, unable to fully satisfy, and not-self.' Throw them into the mass grave of these universal characteristics. The clinging to the likeable things we get, have, and are, will then cease. We come to see everything as essentially the same. Everything we then experience generates insight into the Dhamma.

Everything I've said so far is simply for you to listen to and think about. It's just talk, that's all. When people come to see me, I speak. These sorts of subjects aren't the things we should sit around and gab about for hours. *Just do it.* Get in there and do it. It's like when we call a friend to go somewhere. We invite them. We get an answer. Then we're off, without a big fuss. We say just the right amount and leave it at that. I can tell you a thing or two about meditation, because I've done the work. But you know, maybe I'm wrong. Your job is to investigate and find out for yourself if what I say is true.

¹: *Kesā, Lomā, Nakhā, Dantā, Taco*; contemplation of these five bodily parts constitutes the first meditation technique taught to a newly ordained monk or nun by their preceptor.

Just This Much

Do you know where it will end? Or will you just keep on studying like this? Or is there an end to it? That's okay but it's external study, not internal study. For internal study you have to study these eyes, these ears, this nose, this tongue, this body and this mind. This is the real study. The study of books is just external study, it's really hard to get it finished.

When the eye sees form what sort of thing happens? When ear, nose and tongue experience sounds, smells and tastes, what takes place? When the body and mind come into contact with touches and mental states, what reactions take place? Are greed, aversion and delusion still there? Do we get lost in forms, sounds, smells, tastes, textures and moods? This is the internal study. It has a point of completion.

If we study but don't practise we won't get any results. It's like a man who raises cows. In the morning he takes the cow out to pasture, in the evening he brings it back to its pen - but he never drinks the cow's milk. Study is all right, but don't let it be like this. You should raise the cow and drink its milk too. You must study and practise as well to get the best results.

Here, I'll explain it further. It's like a man who raises chickens, but doesn't collect the eggs. All he gets is the chicken dung! This is what I tell the people who raise chickens back home. Watch out you don't become like that! This means we study the scriptures but we don't know how to let go of defilements, we don't know how to 'push' greed, aversion and delusion from our mind. Study without practice, without this 'giving up', brings no results. This is why I compare it to someone who raises chickens but doesn't collect the eggs, he just collects the dung. It's the same thing.

Because of this, the Buddha wanted us to study the scriptures, and then to give up evil actions through body, speech and mind; to develop goodness in our deeds, speech and thoughts. The real worth of mankind will come to fruition through our deeds, speech and thoughts. If we only talk, without acting accordingly, it's not yet complete. Or if we do good deeds but the mind is still not good, this is still not complete. The Buddha taught to develop goodness in body, speech and mind; to develop fine deeds, fine speech and fine thoughts. This is the treasure of mankind. The study and the practice must both be good.

The eightfold path of the Buddha, the path of practice, has eight factors. These eight factors are nothing other than this very body: two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, one tongue and one body. This is the path. And the mind is the one who follows the path. Therefore both the study and the practice exist in

our body, speech and mind.

Have you ever seen scriptures which teach about anything other than the body, the speech and the mind? The scriptures only teach about this, nothing else. Defilements are born right here. If you know them, they die right here. So you should understand that practice and study both exist right here. If we study just this much we can know everything. It's like our speech: to speak one word of truth is better than a lifetime of wrong speech. Do you understand? One who studies and doesn't practise is like a ladle in a soup pot. It's in the pot every day but it doesn't know the flavour of the soup. If you don't practise, even if you study till the day you die, you'll never know the taste of freedom!



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